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A PATTERN FOR THE PRAIRIE NOVEL: ROMANCE ELEMENTS IN SELECTED PROSE OF THE CANADIAN WEST, 1930-1970

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Pattern for the Prairie Novel: Romance Elements in Selected Prose of the Canadian West, 1930-1970" submitted by Janice Darlene Cherewick in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

During the 1920s, a trend towards realism begins in the fiction of the Canadian West. Critics such as E. A. McCourt have regarded the trend as an indication that prairie writers are finally on the way to achieving success in the artistic re-creation of the prairie way of life. But realism, which is a conservative and normative mode, and which requires the framework of a relatively stable society, is not the most suitable mode for prairie fiction. For one reason, the prairie lacks an intensively developed social framework on which to base an objective representation of contemporary social reality. A more important reason is that the prairie setting is a uniquely radical setting, and therefore not amenable to the mediative tendency of realism. Like the sea, the prairie is a type of eternity, and it elicits a profound imaginative response from the people who live within its confines. In fiction, that response is best realized in the romance mode, for romance is primarily a means of envisioning intangible, imaginative realms. The prairie setting, in all its impalpable emptiness, is easily a setting in which perceptions of tangible realities evolve into conceptions that are abstract and universal in their import. In fact, as Frederick Philip Grove and E. A. McCourt show in their non-fictional prose, the prairie setting is, practically by definition, the donné setting of romance. What seems to be the innate romance sensibility of the prairie writer shows in the fact that romance elements persist, even in the fictional prose of Grove and McCourt, who both purport to be realists. McCourt's Music at the Close (1947) and Grove's Fruits of the Earth (1933) represent the failure of realism in the artistic re-creation of the prairie

way of life. In contrast, Sinclair Ross and Robert Kroetsch both tend towards romance--Ross by way of impressionism in As For Me and My House (1941) and Kroetsch by way of surrealism in The Words of my Roaring (1966) --in two successful artistic re-creations of the prairie way of life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. INTRODUCTION 1

II. McCOURT AND GROVE: THE FAILURE OF REALISM: TENSION WITHOUT POISE 49

  McCourt 49

  Grove 74

III. TENSION WITH POISE: LYRICAL STASIS IN ROSS: THE UNBROKEN CIRCUIT IN KROETSCH 98

  Ross 98

  Kroetsch 128

IV. CONCLUSION 159

***

NOTES TO CHAPTERS 165

BIBLIOGRAPHY 177

INTRODUCTION

I

In the final chapter of The Canadian West in Fiction, E. A. McCourt writes: "In spite of one or two fine individual achievements, it cannot be claimed for the novelists of the Canadian West that they have created a body of literature which tells adequately the story of the great prairie region. Nor, which is to be more regretted, has any one of them recorded human experience in a way which, to the complete satisfaction of the reader, identifies that experience with truth."[1] McCourt bases his judgement of the prose fiction of the prairies on an examination of works written between 1871 and 1947--a span of nearly eighty years--by a dozen authors. He finds several different kinds of shortcomings in the majority of their works, but, generally, he focuses on what seems to be their common inability to create believable characters. In his view, only four authors--Robert J. C. Stead, W. O. Mitchell, Christine Van Der Mark, and Sinclair Ross--are successful, or partly successful, in evoking prairie character in relation to prairie landscape. One other author, Frederick Philip Grove, he sees as having made a valiant attempt:

> Grove is not a great novelist, for the power to create living people was denied him; but he brought a cultured mind to the contemplation of the Western scene, and an eye for specific detail which will make his work a valuable source of information to the rural historian of the future. His statement of purpose in writing Fruits of the Earth--'to infuse a dramatic interest into agricultural operations and that attendant life thereof'--holds true of all his Western novels. He failed to infuse adequately the dramatic interest, but his record of 'agricultural operations and the attendant life thereof' is one of the most accurate in Canadian fiction. (70)

It should be noted that McCourt is careful to emphasize the fact that Grove's work has value, not as art, but as social document. McCourt's basic argument in The Canadian West in Fiction seems to be that whatever success has been achieved in the artistic re-creation of the prairie way of life has been a result of the authors' striving for realism. As René Wellek points out, in his chapter on "Realism in Literary Scholarship" in Concepts of Criticism, "The theory of realism is ultimately bad aesthetics because all art is 'making' and is a world in itself of illusion and symbolic forms."[2] In this sense, then, a trend towards realism is ultimately a trend towards non-art. And, if Grove's work is less artistic than documentary, it is true to say that the trend towards realism in the fiction of the Canadian West begins with the publication of Grove's Settlers of the Marsh in 1925.[3] But I think McCourt is aware of the possible implications involved in using "realistic" without providing a context which adequately suggests its meaning. He does not use the term with regard to Grove; nor does he more than imply it with regard to the authors he praises. Nevertheless, it is a significant, if somehow covert, term because of its initial placement in The Canadian West in Fiction. In the third chapter, where McCourt undertakes his first full discussion of a major prose work, he writes: "Trooper and Redskin, by Lance-Corporal William Donkin of the North-West Mounted Police, might well be required reading of all those brought up in the romantic tradition of the Riders of the Plains. . . In Trooper and Redskin [Donkin] describes his experiences without romanticizing them. . . He is our first Canadian realist. Few writers since Donkin have conveyed more effectively the sense of desolation and heart-breaking loneliness which the prairie scene communicates to the newcomer from the populous regions of America or the Old World" (11).

McCourt then quotes a lengthy descriptive passage in which, to his mind, the only images that need forgiving--presumably because they are inconsistent with the tone of the rest of the passage--are references to "a starved coyote" and a "blizzard revelling in demon riot." He goes on to appreciate the quality of "dry, sardonic humour" (12) evident in other excerpts, and he closes the discussion with a reiteration: "It is a pity [Donkin] did not try his hand at fiction. One suspects that had he done so he would have been our first realistic novelist" (12).

This initial analysis is important because it sets the tone for the analyses to follow; and it indicates, generally, the critical premises with which McCourt means to engage the fiction. His terms need clarification. But his critical stance is basically as follows: valid art is realistic; to be realistic means, primarily, to eschew the romantic. As he proceeds with his analyses, it becomes clear that McCourt regards the author's technique of characterization as the most significant index of difference between realism and romance. But a successful technique must always be a function of the author's ability to evoke the prairie itself:

> The writer who seeks to inform his readers of the peculiar quality of a region such as the prairie provinces should be a pictorial artist able to describe accurately the physical features of a characteristic prairie landscape; he should be a poet with power to feel and to re-create imaginatively the particular atmosphere which invests the prairie scene; and lastly, he should be a psychologist with sufficient knowledge of human nature to be able to understand and describe the influence of the region upon the people who live within its confines. True regional literature is above all distinctive in that it illustrates the effect of particular, rather than general, physical, economic and racial features upon the lives of ordinary men and women. It should and usually does do many other things besides, but if it does not illustrate the influence of a limited and peculiar environment it is not true regional literature. (55)

This last poses a genuine problem for the prairie writer. How is he to bring to fictional life ordinary men and women whose plain humanness is fully realized, yet whose common idiosyncratic cast is recognizably of prairie moulding? It seems that, for the sake of regional integrity, some kind of "type-casting" is inevitable so that the abstract concept of a general "prairie human nature" is fully comprehensible. But, for the sake of human integrity, the figures by whom the general prairie nature is known must be recognizably individual and unique.

The problem ultimately becomes a question of the author's choice of form; or, to use a less definitive, more flexible term, his choice of mode. McCourt judges that prairie authors who have chosen to work in the romantic mode have achieved little artistic success. He places his hopes for the potential achievement of prairie artistry on what he sees as the trend away from romance, a trend beginning in the works of such authors as Stead, who, "instead of emphasizing the sensational and romantic," turn to "the serious portrayal of the ordinary men and women of ordinary Western communities in their ordinary occupations" (83). The reiterated "ordinary" here calls attention to itself. It is as if McCourt wants his readers to detect a certain irony in the word--irony in the simple sense that appearance and reality are not quite the same; that prairie mediocrity is really rather special because unique. I agree with McCourt's claim that prairie land and prairie people are unique; and I mean to show that he has been one of the few authors to date who has convincingly evoked this uniqueness, not in his own published fictional works, but in his non-fiction--particularly the prologue and epilogue of his montage travelogue-history-geography simply entitled Saskatchewan. I consider legitimate his summary, quoted above, of necessary qualifications for the prairie writer.

For, in attempting to analyze the way in which an author shows the influence of the region upon the people who live within its confines, the reader has a purposeful way of engaging the work. However, I do not agree that the way to artistic achievement for the prairie author is the way of realism.

My thesis is that romance elements persist in the fiction of the Canadian West, despite the trend towards realism that begins in the 1920s; and these elements persist because, consciously or unconsciously, the authors find the realistic mode too confining. I do not mean to insist that prairie novelists of the twentieth century are the unacknowledged romancers of Canada. But perhaps, at heart, they are. The prairie is a radical place--radical in practically all the senses of the word, but radical especially in the way Mitchell describes: "Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky--Saskatchewan prairie."[4] The prairie is also a strangely neutral yet changeable place, with miles of seemingly static, level landscape abruptly spilling into an unexpected valley, and with days of seemingly static weather abruptly shattered by climactic cataclysm. Now realism is conservative and normative. Sprung from a setting that is at once radical and neutral, with a latent anarchism in that neutrality, the essential spirit of the prairie cannot move with poise in the realistic mode. The writers who attempt to evoke the essential spirit of the prairie require a less conservative, more radical mode. So, they tend towards romance. As Northrop Frye says, in a passage which I must quote at greater length later on, "The romancer deals with individuality, with characters _in vacuo_ idealized by revery, and, however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untameable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages."[5]

There might be something of an anomaly in referring to "characters *in vacuo*" after so much stressing of characters in relation to prairie environment. But there are times when the prairie can be conceived of as analogous to a vacuum, when the characters seem no longer to be surrounded by their normal element, and are isolated, as if in suspension, in an extraordinary atmosphere. Grove's Abe Spalding frequently seems to be detached from the earth itself; imaginatively freed from its gravitational pull, he becomes one with the mirage world that hovers over the prairie on the hottest days. Mitchell's Brian O'Connal, spending a night alone on the prairie, is utterly detached from family and community, and so begins to lose his sense of self. And Ross's Mrs. Bentley, writing of a town completely encurtained by dust, says, "The dust is so thick that sky and earth are just a blur. You can scarcely see the elevators at the end of town. One step beyond, you think, and you'd go plunging into space."[6] It is at these times, when the prairie is conceived of as an extraordinary or alien atmosphere, that individual characters show their uniqueness by growing into outlines somewhat larger than those of the "general prairie human nature" I have referred to earlier; or by shrinking into outlines somewhat smaller. Abe Spalding, for example, expands into something more than a tirelessly ambitious farmer; but Mrs. Bentley contracts to the point that she has not even a first name. It is at these times, then, that the characters' behaviour must bear the closest analysis.

In *Man's Changing Mask*, Charles Walcutt writes: "I believe that character is like the quantum of the physicists. This ultimate particle cannot be located except when it jumps, and it jumps so quick that it cannot be arrested in flight. They know it exists because it jumps, but they can see only the movement rather than the particle itself, if particle is indeed what it is. Character manifests itself in action, obviously."[7] But there are many modes of action: speech, or dialogue, is action and interaction; and thought, or stream-of-consciousness, represents the mind in action. If the people of the prairie are to have a fully realized fictional life, they must be shown in the process of evolving, or attempting to evolve, concepts of metaphysics, psychology, ethics, and religion—conceptual realms which Yvor Winters rightly calls "the most profoundly human realms of our being."[8] It is not true that the prairie farmer has no time to think about such things. And, if he is truly a prairie man, his conceptions of the intangible world are bound to be coloured by his perception of the land. Take the concept of religion, for example. If the First Cause can be known from second causes, then the law of prairie nature as second cause is likely to foster a pre-Christian view of God. He is a god of willful power; sometimes indifferent, often to be feared and, if possible, placated by sacrifice; seldom a god of benevolent love. The relationship between prairie man and his god is either a primitive or an Old Testament one. The dust-pall that settled over the prairies during the thirties is a veritable type of the visitation of the Law; and, in typical Old Testament fashion, the Law descended on the heads of the people because they had sinned against the land.

It makes too broad a generalization to say that the Christian concept of lambs and lions in amicable harmony--the concept which informs the trend towards a normalized, harmonious community in the English realistic novel--is totally alien to the prairie. Nevertheless, prairie literature frequently evokes a view of the land as mask of god on a scale of perception that slides between a vision of complete indifference at one extreme, and a vision of Manichean forces at the other. To Grove's

Abe Spalding, for example, the prairie is sometimes ineffably beautiful, but its spirit evinces itself in the witch-laughter of the malignant Mrs. Grappentin. And Mitchell's Brian O'Connal, intrigued but puzzled by the strangely amoral nature of the Young Ben--Ben as in the Hebrew--"son of" the prairie, finally concludes that the moral construct by which he lives must be formed through a compromise between the more or less normalized, amicable social sphere and the aloof natural sphere. The point is, prairie man's concepts of the intangible world, the world he can't know directly, can hardly be evoked without the aid of the metaphorical keys romance provides. Metaphor involves saying something is something else when it cannot literally be so; metaphor enables the writer to make apprehensible the meeting between actual and imaginary. In romance, the metaphorical keys are very frequently derived from myth. As Northrop Frye says: "Realism, or the art of verisimilitude, evokes the response 'How like that is to what we know!' When what is written is like what is known, we have an art of extended or implied simile. And as realism is an art of implicit simile, myth is an art of implicit metaphorical identity."[9] Romantic metaphorical keys in the form of myths, either implied or explicit, and with or without accretions of irony, are found throughout prairie literature. The whole of Ross's As For Me and My House, for example, implies the myth of the Wasteland,[10] with the infertility of the principal characters matched by the infertility of the land. Kroetsch's Johnnie Backstrom is a mythical rain god because his promise that the rain shall fall is fulfilled. But ironically, the point of epiphany--the point when Johnnie seems most god-like in the eyes of his constituents--is also the point at which full realization of his own small humanness comes to him. In his case, there is at once a conceivable growth into outlines larger than life and a perceivable shrinking into ordinary human outlines.

II

In order to establish the general tenor of my thesis, I have been anticipating myself, and using terms like "realistic" and "romantic" without sufficient clarification. I must now attempt to clarify these terms, and establish the limits of what McCourt intends by them, and the limits of what I intend by them. The attempt will be lengthy, for two reasons. First, in the history of literary criticism, "realistic" and "romantic"--but especially "romantic"--have acquired both quantitative and qualitative connotations. Since I cannot hope to re-trace, entire, the evolution of romance and still have room to analyze and assess some examples of prairie fiction, I have selected those definitions which best illustrate my thesis.[11] A second reason for the lengthiness of the first chapter is that, in addition to attempting to clarify terms, I am taking a somewhat hypothetical approach to prairie literature, and attempting to show that it is very natural for the prairie writer to tend towards romance because the prairie setting is, practically by definition, ideal for romance. In this regard, I refer frequently to the non-fictional prose of McCourt and Grove. It seems to me that both authors express themselves more freely and naturally in non-fiction than in fiction--perhaps because, in their discursive writings, they are not constrained to be artful according to some personally acknowledged aesthetic theory.

In the subsequent chapters, my purpose is as follows: to analyze McCourt's Music at the Close (1947) in order to show how it represents the failure of realism; to analyze Grove's Fruits of the Earth (1933) in order to show how romance elements intrude in a work that purports to be realistic and thus create an unresolved ambivalence of tone; to discuss Ross's

As For Me and My House (1941) as an example of romance in its most lyrical, most subjective mode;[12] and lastly, to analyze Kroetsch's The Words of my Roaring (1966) in order to show how it most closely approximates a hypothetical ideal of the prairie novel. Kroetsch takes the tall tale, which has its roots in medieval romance, and extends it into a legitimate and serious form. He evokes an exuberant and lively sense of oratory--the sense of the story-teller who, in the tradition of the romance balladeers of old, both entertains and mesmerizes his audience--not only in the radio rhetoric of Socred leader "Applecart," but in the rhetoric of Johnnie Backstrom's thoughts.

It will be noted that my selection of fiction is not in exact chronological order. There is a reason. In attempting to describe the evolution of the form of the novel, Maurice Shroder suggests that its development has been from romance, through realism, to modern neo-romance; or alternatively, from myth, through demythification, to remythification, with the modern use of myth being, usually, ironic. He says, "The novel shares with romance an emphasis on human situations rather than ideas: both deal in experiential reality rather than theoretical questions."[13] But, "Romance in its medieval mode is essentially escapist literature; it appeals to the emotions and imagination of the reader, invites him to marvel at an enchanted world of triumphant adventure--and the triumph may be the slaying of a dragon or the unmasking of a corrupt sheriff. The novel, however, leads the reader back to reality by questioning the basis of romance." The crux of the novel is irony--the apprehensible distinction between appearance and reality. However, "as the novel grew out of the romance through the ironic attitude and manner that we now call realism, so--as our views of reality have changed, and as the ironic fiction that depicted the contrast of appearance and reality has made its point--something new has grown out of the novel." That "something new" is perhaps best represented in fiction of the Canadian West by Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man, a work which defies generic classification and which, as yet, I am honestly unable to engage fully. The point I mean to make by including Shroder's miniature sketch of the evolution of the novel is that the prairie novel simply has not had time to evolve in what might be called a natural way. I do not wish to undertake an exhaustive discussion of the problems, some of them arising out of cultural isolation, that beset the prairie writer. The fact is, Western Canadian writers in the first decades of the twentieth century have not been unaware of literary trends in Europe and the United States. In a sense, they are fledglings being force-fed by other cultures, and they have had to evolve their forms quickly. In the long course of history, thirty-three years, 1933-1966, is practically all at once. By beginning my analyses with McCourt's realistic Music at the Close, I am making an arbitrary effort to engage prairie literature at the point where the basis of such escapist romance as, say, that of Connor, is clearly questioned; and then I am trying to follow it through to the point where romance re-emerges in a more serious, though certainly ironic, form.

ROMANCE: A QUANTITY, A QUALITY, AND A HYPOTHESIS

I

By romantic, McCourt means, first, the frankly sensational, thrilling quality of tales of hair-raising--or hair-losing--adventure that have no basis whatsoever in actual fact. He says:

> To the romantically-minded would-be novelists of the West, the second Riel Rebellion of 1885 came as a godsend. Here at last in Canada was the kind of action that readers had become accustomed to associating with the American frontier. Here was the blood and thunder they wanted to read about and were willing to pay for--whooping Indians on the war-path--settlers, white-faced, resolute, crouching behind barred doors--and across the dusty plains the Mounties and the militia riding unheard of distances to effect a stirring last minute rescue and restore the supremacy of the white man throughout the land! (14)

In truth, "the Riel Rebellion resolved itself into a series of petty skirmishes in which the militia gained some experience and no distinction." The real hero of the rebellion turned out to be "the shabby little Messiah, Louis Riel, whom judicial and governmental intransigence elevated to the role of martyr" (14). As yet, there have been no serious attempts made to capture the true facts of the Riel story in fiction.[1] And there is not much material available for the creation of a factually-based adventure story patterned along the lines of the "Wild West" fiction of the American frontier. The Canadian prairie frontier has a different history. I shall not attempt to outline it fully here, but McCourt suggests a number of reasons for the differences between the frontier experiences of the two countries. For one, the settlement of the Canadian frontier was relatively peaceful because of the presence of the North-West Mounted Police, a force which the Dominion government had the foresight to place on the prairies well in advance of the main tide of settlers. In contrast,

> on the American frontier army forces arrived long after savage warfare between white man and Indian had become part of the frontier pattern; and many of the army men, veterans of four years' atrocious civil conflict, assumed that the simplest way to establish peace was to kill all the Indians. But much of the credit for the peaceful settlement of the Canadian West must go to the men of the original peace force. Their courage and endurance were beyond question; and most of the members, particularly those with Old Country back-grounds, assumed almost by instinct the role of guardians over lesser breeds without the law.[2]

The reference to the Old Country introduces another reason for difference. Not only did the Mounties represent a continuity of the legal traditions of the Old Country, but many of the settlers were Old Country educated as well, and McCourt jokingly refers to the fact that the second thing they established in their new community--the first was either a church or a police barracks--was a Literary Society. Since Canada has yet to have her War of Independence, there was felt no self-conscious need--during frontier times, at least--to establish a native literature. For the contrasting American attitude, I offer this excerpt from William Gilmore Simms's preface to The Yemassee:

> 'The Yemassee' is proposed as an American romance. It is so styled as much of the material could have been furnished by no other country. Something too much of extravagance--so some may think,--even beyond the usual license of fiction--may enter into certain parts of the narrative. On this subject, it is enough for me to say, that the popular faith yields abundant authority for the wildest of its incidents. The natural romance of our country has been my object, and I have not dared beyond it.[3]

There have not been any Sanutees in Canadian prairie fiction. Nor have there been any Deerslayers. Consequently, I cannot offer, as counter to McCourt's pejorative first use of "romantic", either Simms's or James Fenimore Cooper's definitions and defences of romance--despite the fact that I consider both their prefatorial apologies valid.[4]

In The Road Across Canada, McCourt offers another reason for the difference between Canadian and American frontier experience. He describes how "the MacDougalls, Father Lacombe, and a dozen other stout-hearted champions of the Cross roamed the plains and mountain valleys, founded their missions, fought the whiskey-traders, and saved from destruction many Indian bodies and perhaps a few souls. In the restored frontier towns of the western United States the saloons, honky-tonks, and Boot Hills predominate, in western Canada the mission churches and Mounted Police posts. Strong men of God worked hand in hand with the Mounties to make the Canadian West a tough place for sinners." And he adds, in afterthought, "It still is."[5] It is with regard to one of these strong men of God, Charles William Gordon--pen-named Ralph Connor--that McCourt suggests a second meaning for romantic. Around 1900, he says, "the Canadian West was the last great frontier of the New World, an Empire within an Empire already absorbing immigrants at the rate of nearly fifty thousand a year and calling for more. It was a land of promise, a land of romance. . . a land where it was possible, if need be, to forget the past and begin again" (20-21). In this context, romantic means Edenic. The promised land, whether it exists simply as a country of the mind--as the ideal Jerusalem still exists while the spiritual Diaspora still maintains--or whether it is conceived of as having some actual but inaccessible geographical setting--like Shangri-la --typifies our universal desire to start again clean, and become what we imagine we could ideally be. As Shroder says, "Romance reflects an eternal tendency of the human mind that goes all but unaffected by historical change."[6] However it is conceived, the promised land is always remote, always closer to the imaginary than to the actual. Now the Canadian prairie, insofar as it is--or has been--free from the restraints, conventions, and corruptions of an older society, seems to have all the attributes of the ideal romance setting. But where Connor errs, says McCourt, and I agree with him, is in sincerely believing that this setting is appropriate for the fictional illustration of the Christian doctrine of regeneration. Connor's characters are either good through and through, or evil ostensibly but really good at heart; and everybody ends by being good and amicable--lambs and lions; peace in the valley.

But McCourt goes on to say that Connor's stories now seem too good to be true because, "To a generation to whom Buchenwald and Hiroshima and the gas-chambers of Osweicim and Birkenau are monstrous facts, the devil in man is at least as obvious as the god" (30). This might be part of the reason, but it isn't the crux. The real reason why Connor's stories are failed romances is that he lacked the ability to evoke his setting with just the right tone. Generally, his tone is simply too congenial, or cheery. True, he dealt mostly with foothills country rather than prairie. But there is a sense in which the mountains and the plains share a similar remoteness, and a similar tonal quality in that remoteness. In The Road Across Canada, McCourt strikes the right tone in his sensitive response to mountains and plains:

> Mountains, I feel, are unsuitable companions for the daily round. For they have nothing in common with temporal things--they belong among the most awesome symbols of eternity.[7]
>
> The best time to see the mountains of the West is at daybreak, not from within their shadow but from a point somewhere far out on the high plain. At first they seem to flow away into the distance in an unbroken mass, but as the dawn brightens they assume individual identity, separate into enormous hunch-backed figures, forever marching and forever fixed, that dwarf into nothingness all things that live; and the great plain in its uncomplicated immensity absorbs all traces of man's being. It is then, in the strange half-light of coming dawn, that the mountains and the plain assume a grandeur and immutability that compel the beholder, however arrogant he may be in the light of common day, to recognize his own insigificance.

> I have often thought that the high plain and mountain country of Alberta is no place for an ambitious man. In the city you can build up and tear down skyscrapers and feel yourself a god; but no man can move a mountain or make more than a few scratches, soon to be obliterated, on the limitless surface of the plain.[8]

"In the strange half-light of coming dawn . . ." McCourt doesn't know how close he is here to romance--not the trivial romance of fantastic adventure; not the escapist romance of peace in the valley; but serious romance which provides a means of imaginatively conceiving and exploring the most profoundly human realms of our being. In trying to explain the sense of remoteness, the tone of aloofness which characterizes the landscape of the Canadian West--which Connor was unable to capture--McCourt comes very close to giving us the kind of lesson in perception that Nathaniel Hawthorne gives in "The Custom-House" chapter of his hall-mark romance, The Scarlet Letter.

The shared perceptual key is the strange half-light. In "The Custom-House" chapter, Hawthorne is trying to evoke the most suitable atmosphere in which the actual and the imaginary may meet in a way that is fully apprehensible--a way that does not jar the reader's suspension of disbelief. So, he describes an ordinary parlour lighted only by a glimmering coal fire and the moon. Given the quality of the light, all the commonplace objects in the parlour,

> all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse;--whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.[9]

Hawthorne goes on to say that, at such a twilight hour, "and with this scene before him, if a man, sitting all alone, cannot dream strange things, and make them look like truth, he need never try to write romances."[10] In the remaining chapters of The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne undertakes a profound exploration of the concept of sin in the context of New England Puritan theocracy. But his exploration would be without the depth and power it has if he had not first inducted his readers into a romance perspective--a perspective by which the actual and the imaginary can be seen truly to meet--in the opening chapter. And it is on the point of perspective that what McCourt means by romance and what I mean by romance diverge most widely. Romance is a way of envisioning the intangible world. But McCourt does not seem to grant romance this efficacy--or, I should say, he grants it only a limited efficacy. From the way in which he discusses the fiction of such authors as Connor, and McClung and Salverson at their most sentimental, it is clear that he considers romance to be like a set of rose-coloured glasses.

McCourt's description of the Canadian West excerpted above bespeaks how immediate is the availability of strange--strange in the sense of inhospitable to humanity--and remote settings in which the writer might present actual man imaginatively conceiving of his relationship with intangible realms. But, as Hawthorne so carefully shows, the meeting between actual and imaginary will seem unnatural unless the ambient tone and atmosphere are meticulously controlled. As for tonal colour, Richard Chase points out that the American romance is characterized by a rich interplay of lights and darks, and he suggests that the contrasting shades represent an imaginative response to New England Puritanism, "with its grand metaphors of election and damnation, its opposition of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, its eternal and autonomous contraries of good and evil."[11] Now, on the Canadian prairie, notwithstanding the fact that strong men of God saved many bodies and perhaps a few souls, Puritanism ought to be spelled with a small "p"; for it usually means, in the narrowest sense, intolerance and bigotry. Prairie man conceives of his god, not so much with reference to theological dogma, but more with reference to the land. In the prose passages which represent an attempt to convey a perception of the land that grows into a conception of things eternal and intangible, the base or central tonal colour is, very frequently, grey or strangely achromatic. I'm not sure why. Perhaps, as McCourt suggests, because the most obvious characteristic of the environment is monotony.[12] In The Road Across Canada, he describes his sensations during a drive through the southern part of Saskatchewan:

> . . . no matter how high the speedometer climbs we must yield sooner or later to a sense of utter frustration. For nothing changes. Not the land unrolling like wrinkled parchment on either side of the Highway to a point beyond the range of sight (or so it seems, for a blue haze shrouds the horizon); and not the enormous bowl of sky through which a jet traces a visible line 300 miles long. The Highway curves from time to time for no apparent reason, except, perhaps, to counteract road hypnosis, and no surprises lie in wait around the next bend.
>
> Or the next.
>
> Empty land, Empty sky. A stranger to the prairies feels uneasily that he is driving straight into infinity.
>
> The land is without character. It excites neither hatred nor love. There is nothing here to respond to. Not the austere, sinister loneliness of a true desert nor the friendly security of a conventional pastoral landscape.[13]

Here indeed is the neutral territory where actual and imaginary may meet, and imbue itself with the nature of the other. As the passage continues, McCourt remarks how readily the deserted farmsteads remind one of Edgar

Allen Poe's gloom-ridden House of Usher. "And, one suspects, many a farm wife of a past generation must have felt a strong sense of kinship with the tragic Lady Madeline: the kindship of being buried alive."[14] McCourt goes on to insist that, in actual fact, the deserted farmsteads are not symbols of the triumph of hostile nature over man. Little farms have simply been incorporated into bigger and more prosperous ones, and so the sense of depression is unjustified. But McCourt cannot close his description on a note of actuality. Despite the fact that he is a sometimes inexorable realist in his fictional Music at the Close, he has the romance sensibility which I think comes naturally to the true prairie man, and this sensibility is given free expression here. He closes the passage with: "Saskatchewan is a land in which modern man finds it hard to live with and by himself. Especially at night when the loneliness closes in and earth and sky assume a detachment and an immensity that compel an awareness of worlds not realized in the light of common day."[15] Manitoba and Alberta have their differences from Saskatchewan,[16] but they have their monotonies too. In Manitoba it is miles and miles of northern bushland that appeals to the imagination of Grove when he begins to conceive of intangible worlds. In Over Prairie Trails he describes his sensations during a sleigh-drive through the winter woods. I quote the passage at length because its tonal quality is cumulative:

> . . . Under the brush of the wild land which I was skirting by now there seemed to be quite as much of luminosity as overhead. The mist was the thinnest haze, and it seemed to derive its whiteness as much from the virgin snow on the ground as from above. I could not cease to marvel at this light which seemed to be without a source--like the halo around the Saviour's face. The eye as yet did not reach very far, and wherever I looked, I found but one word to describe it: impalpable--and that is saying what it was not rather than what it was. As I said, there was no sunshine, but the light was there, omnipresent, diffused, coming mildly, softly, but from all sides, and out of all things as well as

> into them. . . . We have such days about four or five times a year--and none but the northern countries have them. There are clouds--or rather, there is a uniform layer of cloud, very high, and just the slightest suggestion of curdiness in it; and the light is very white. These days seem to waken in me every wander instinct that lay asleep. There is nothing definite, nothing that seems to be emphasized--something seems to beckon to me and to invite me to take my wings--as if I could glide without sinking, glide and still keep my height . . . If you see the sun at all--as I did not on this day of days--he stands away up, very distant and quite aloof. He looks more like the moon than like his own self, white and heatless and lightless, as if it were not he at all from whom all this transparency and visibility proceeded. . .[17]

Because the tone of this passage is so carefully controlled, the conjectural "as if" that introduces the romantic bird-as-imagination metaphor is scarecely noticeable, and the movement from actual to imaginary spheres is easy and natural. It is a sensuous passage, but somehow, paradoxically, coolly or austerely sensuous. As he goes on, Grove enhances the mood of austerity by contrasting his northern setting with some of the more Keatsian, more richly colourful places he has known--places now dim and distant in imagination as well as in actuality:

> When the years began to pile up, I longed to stake off my horizons, to flatten out my views. I wanted the simpler, the more elemental things, things cosmic in their association, nearer to the beginning or end of creation. The parrot that flashed through "nutmeg groves" did not hold out so much allurement as the simple grey-and-slaty junco. The things that are unobtrusive and differentiated by shadings only--grey in grey above all--like our northern woods, like our sparrows, our wolves--they held a more compelling attraction than orgies of colour and screams of sound. So I came home to the north.[18]

"Shadings only--grey in grey . . ."; once again, a strangely neutral, twilight vision where the actual and the imaginary merge and evolve into a concept of the cosmic. It is a long way from the northern woods of Manitoba and the empty land of Saskatchewan to the deck of "Pequod." But I think of Ishmael's: "Can you catch the expression of the Sperm Whale's there?

It is the same he died with, only some of the longer wrinkles in the forehead seem now faded away. I think his brow to be full of a prairie-like placidity, born of a speculative indifference as to death."[19]

I have said that romance is a way of envisioning the intangible--or, to pick up Melville's term, the speculative--world. In order for the romancer's vision to be made apprehensible for the reader, the romancer must try to induce in the reader the same perceptual stance, the same angle of perspective, as his own. And this involves a solicitous control of tone and atmosphere. In fact, tone and atmosphere are more important for the romancer's purposes than narrative action. Characteristically, romance action is evolved episodically, or in a sequence of subtly staged tableaux, rather than narratively. The romancer stands between the reader and the work, and he holds up, not a mirror in which the reader might see himself and his customary ways, but a tinted glass through which the reader might see commonplace people and things momentarily lifted out of their daily pattern of movement, momentarily spot-lighted on a three-dimensional stage, and momentarily freed from their everyday concreteness, and transformed into things of intellect by the special colouring. In other words, the thorough-going romancer deals in metamorphosis rather than mimesis, and he makes free to dispense with a faithful, extensive re-creation of the actions and events of the ordinary daily round. Hawthorne, in the preface to another work, The House of the Seven Gables, justifies the dispensation this way:

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must

> rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.[20]

The "laws" are derived from Aristotle's Poetics: "the poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities."[21] Like Aristotle's poet, the romancer relates, not what has happened, but what may happen--what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. Romance is therefore a more philosophical and a higher thing than the novel; for romance tries to express the eternal and the universal--"the truth of the human heart"--in the particular while the novel tends to express the temporal in the particular. Ironically enough, once the romancer has established the limits of the latitude he is claiming, and once he has convinced his readers to suspend their disbelief in improbable possibilities, particularities of local manners and ordinary local characters become a positive intrusion. In part the reason for this is that there is simply too much business and activity associated with local characters in their customary mode of behaviour. The romancer must keep his figures relatively still if they are not to break the illusion he has created of a special atmosphere. Once he has, as it were, set his stage and planned his lighting effects so that things that appear fantastic or absurd or incongruous in the light of common day now seem completely in harmony with their illusionary milieu, it is truly easier for the romancer to deal artfully with the imaginary than with the actual. For, given the magical quality of romance setting, mundane things, particularly if their appearance is abrupt, appear absurd and incongruous in their own right. They are simply too probable and immediate for the romance milieu.

II

Now, so far as I know, none of the prairie writers I have read profess to be romancers. Grove and McCourt, the only two who have written extensively about the aesthetics of fiction, both purport to be realists. But I have tried to show that the Canadian West as they describe it so sensitively in non-fiction is easily the donné setting of romance. And I think that the excerpt from Over Prairie Trails indicates that Grove, at least, has a marked ability to control tone and atmosphere, and so induce a perception of the actual that evolves into a conception of the imaginary. But I think the innate romance sensibility of the prairie writer shows most strikingly in the way, deliberate or involuntary, in which he deals with the particularities of the moment: local manners and customs; ordinary men and women pursuing ordinary occupations. Curiously enough, the occupations themselves are quite congenial for either realism or romance. For there is a sense in which the daily round and the seasonal round of farm activity attain, like the setting, an impalpably neutral, static quality. From a philosophical point of view, the endless, cyclical drudgery of farm routine bespeaks the universal as well as the particular; routine becomes ritualistic, metaphysical.[22] The fact that successful pursuit of ordinary prairie occupations depends almost wholly upon favourable weather conditions is also congenial for either realism or romance. Hawthorne says the romancer should "mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public."[23] The potential prairie romancer need not be quite so subtle. It is easy to regard a downpour of ice at the height of summer—a devastating prairie hailstorm—as somehow marvellous; more marvellous still, if it wipes out your crops and not those of your neighbours.[24] The touchstone for romance sensibility, then, is the characterization of "ordinary" men and women. If they seem more to be embodiments of a view of life than to be life itself, then they have sprung from romance,[25] and might best be judged according to romance conventions.

In this regard, Grove's reference, in the passage from Over Prairie Trails quoted above, to flattened out views and simpler, more elemental things, has important implications for characterization. The reference might well be a postulate for romance characterization. For, according to romance conventions, characterization approximates something between the real and the frankly ideal; between the actual and the imaginary. Not that the romancer absolutely denies individuality. Rather, he eschews using his characters to reflect the complexities of local manner and gesture because these are experiential particulars, immediate rather than remote, and therefore quite unsuitable for conveying cosmic associations. Romance characters are generally flattened out, simplified, made elementary. All the complexities that go into the make-up of a human personality are distilled, as it were, into a single leading idea, and the romance figure becomes the type or symbol of that idea. If the romance figure represents a universally apprehensible and communicable idea, then he can legitimately be called an archetype.[26] He is individualized by being endowed with distinctive mannerisms, or stylized, idiosyncratic, signature gestures—as if it were the romancer's deliberate intention to turn reality into caricature, thereby maintaining a sense of remoteness, and, at the same time, emphasizing certain symbolic associations. And, unlike the novelistic character who changes and develops as the plot unfolds and the narrative unwinds, the romance figure remains essentially static or unchanged. Thus, from a, for now, hypothetical romance point of view, Philip Bentley in Ross's As For Me and My House is not so much a complete personality as he is a type of utter alienation. His most idiosyncratic gesture is to stalk, grim-faced, to his study and close the door behind him. In the case of Philip Bentley, it is Mrs. Bentley who functions as the hypothetical romancer. The author has her guide our perception of Philip by interposing the pages of her journal between us and him.

There is nothing hypothetical about McCourt's judgement of the characters in As For Me and My House. He says they are "neither convincing nor lovable." Mrs. Bentley is "content to submerge her personality so completely in that of her husband as to become something less than human. . . . Philip himself is a curiously wooden character. . . . After a while he becomes a kind of automaton going with mechanical precision through a limited series of movements. And all of the major characters are like Philip in that they are almost wholly static; we know as much of them in the first paragraph as we do in the last" (95-96). I think that, because of his bias towards realism, McCourt misjudges Ross's characters. That he is aware of romance conventions is clear from his discussion of Ralph Connor. But Connor is one of the few authors McCourt is willing to judge according to these conventions. Certainly, Connor's view of life, and therefore his technique of characterization, is limited by being rather too "rosy." But at least it is a consistent and candid view: "The sincere faith with which Connor illustrates his doctrine of regeneration is reflected in his characters. They are extreme simplifications of good and evil, but there is nothing to show that the author is himself aware of the simplification. To the contrary he believes in his characters implicitly because in his own life he tended to see people in strong blacks and whites and outlines larger than human" (22). To McCourt, Connor's characters are mere stereotypes, but they carry a kind of conviction "because their creator never doubts their reality" (23). Now stereotype is to archetype as cliché is to proverb. A cliché is a proverb with the wisdom worn out of it; a stereotype is an archetype without the quality of universal, eternal truth. In a sense, neither the proverb nor the archetype is striking or original; both are self-evident, commonplace, truistic. As Yvor Winters says, "anyone can accept a truism, at least formally."[27] But the real challenge for the writer is in using his craft as a means towards the end of fully realizing the truth of the truism. If he tends to deal in types at all, his originality lies in the way in which he makes his private convictions regarding the truth of his types public convictions as well. In other words, the writer's realization must be fully apprehensible to the reader. But it practically goes without saying that the truth of the type remains inconceivable if the reader comes to a work expecting to find life in exact scale--that is, life in outlines precisely life-like. McCourt grants Connor the right to see his characters in outlines larger than life, and he judges Connor accordingly. It is strange, then, that he does not extend such critical tolerance to other prairie writers who, regardless of what they say about how they see life, show in their works that they see life in outlines larger than human.

Frederick Philip Grove represents the classic case of the prairie writer who somehow feels duty-bound to claim he is a realist,[28] but whose technique of characterization is essentially romantic. His romance sensibility shows in the section of In Search of Myself where he voices his convictions regarding characterization with reference to the creation of Abe Spalding. He remembers how, when he was just twenty-two years old, and had a job hauling wheat from a company farm to the railway, he one day saw a giant of a man silhouetted against the sunset as he ploughed over the crest of a hill.

> The important thing was this. His first appearance, on top of the hill, had tripped a trigger in my imagination; he had become one with many others whom I had known; and an explosion had followed in the nerve-centres of my brain because I had been ready for it. I had, for some time, been ready for the pains of birth. A, to me, momentous thing had happened: the figure of Abe Spalding, central to the book which, forty years later, was published under the title Fruits of the Earth, had been born in my mind, fully armed, as it were, and focalizing in itself a hundred features which I had noted elsewhere. This man, a giant in body, if not in mind and spirit, had furnished the physical features for a vision which had, so far, been incomplete because it had been abstract.[29]

Grove goes on to say that he wished to avoid speaking with the man because actual contact with him would have destroyed the now crystallized vision:

> A perfectly irrelevant actuality would have been superimposed upon my conception of a man who, as I saw him, had perhaps never lived; for he lacked that infusion of myself which makes him what he has become. From a type and a symbol, he would have become an individual; he would have been drained of the truth that lived in him; he would have become a mere fact. . . . This birth of a figure has remained typical for all my work.[30]

In this last, "that infusion of myself" is Coleridgean. I think the similarity between Grove's and Coleridge's attitude to art can be seen from a comparison of Grove's discussion of Abe Spalding and a paragraph from Coleridge's "On Poesy or Art":

> As soon as the human mind is intelligibly addressed by an outward image exclusively of articulate speech, so soon does art commence. But please to observe that I have laid particular stress on the words 'human mind',—meaning to exclude thereby all results common to man and all other sentient creatures, and consequently confining myself to the effect produced by the congruity of the animal impression with the reflective powers of the mind; so that not the thing presented, but that which is re-presented by the thing, shall be the source of pleasure. In this sense nature itself is to a religious observer the art of God; and for the same

> cause art itself might be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing, or . . . the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human. It is the figured language of thought, and is distinguished from nature by the unity of all the parts in one thought or idea. Hence nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part; and a work of art will be just in proportion to the variety of parts which it holds in unity.[31]

This passage takes some digesting. But here is how I see the alignment between it and Grove's discussion. The figure of a man ploughing over the crest of a hill is a mere outward image--a natural thing. But the figure is intelligible to Grove because it "focalizes" a vision which had been abstract. Grove's imaginary Abe Spalding re-presents the mere figure and reconciles it with the abstract vision. Thus, Grove makes Abe the middle quality between thought and thing, and he means Abe to be a unity that holds in proportion a hundred other features which he has noted elsewhere. In other words, Abe approaches archetype.

Grove's intention to render outward images into artistic concepts by an infusion of himself bespeaks his general adherence to nineteenth-century Romantic expressive theories of art. M. H. Abrams summarizes these theories as a "way of thinking, in which the artist himself becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged. . . . Poetry is the overflow, utterance, or projection of the thought and feelings of the poet; or else. . . poetry is defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesizes the images, thoughts, and feelings of the poet."[32] The phrase which unites romance as a prose genre and romance as lyric poetry is: "the artist himself becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged." Now, amongst prairie writers, there are no Hawthornes who preface their works with explanations of how they view their material; or who write "Custom-House" chapters to induct their readers into their romance perspective. But, with regard to characterization, Grove, at least, indicates that he is open to judgement according to romance conventions. Yet McCourt insists that "Grove's people are only occasionally human beings; the main figures are shadowy symbols around whom gather a swarm of puppets. . . who live a while in the memory because their remoteness from reality startles us into looking at them twice" (67). And he says that "symbols, no matter how ingeniously created, are in the end lifeless things" (65). Clearly, McCourt is unwilling to grant that these shadowy symbols, if they are made the means of exploring the profoundly human realms we can't know directly, are life-affirming rather than lifeless.

There is just a touch of Yvor Winters in McCourt's critical stance. Winters approaches Hawthorne--the romancer from whom, obviously, I have been deriving most of what I mean by romance--with the sound assumption that clarity is to be favoured over obscurity. So, he expects Hawthorne's characters to be either real, or pure and intense representations of the ideal. He says:

> . . . Hawthorne had small gift for the creation of human beings, a defect allied to his other defects and virtues: even the figures in The Scarlet Letter are unsatisfactory if one comes to the book expecting to find a novel, for they draw their life not from familiar human characteristics. . . but from the precision and intensity with which they render their respective ideas. . . . When, as in The Marble Faun or The House of the Seven Gables, there is no idea governing the human figure, or when the idea is an incomplete or unsatisfactory equivalent of the figure, the figure is likely to be a disappointing spectacle, for he is seldom if ever a convincing human being and is likely to verge on the ludicrous.[33]

The key conditional clause in this last is: "if one comes to the book expecting to find a novel." What Winters fails to take into account with regard to Hawthorne, and what McCourt does not even entertain as a possibility with regard to Grove, or Ross, or even Mitchell, whom he praises for his "genius for creating instantaneous and powerful impressions," but whom he chides for falling back "on the art of the caricaturist in securing his effects" (101), is that romance convention allows for a good deal of flexibility in characterization. The precise point at which the actual and the imaginary meet is difficult to determine, and anyhow the romancer prefers the point of meeting to be somewhat obscure because stark clarity is not quite in keeping with the shadowy atmosphere he has created. Consequently, romance figures are likely to be found at various points on a sliding scale between the real and the frankly ideal. Thus, from an, again, hypothetical romance point of view, Brian O'Connal is closer to reality while the Young Ben is closer to pure idea. To continue in a hypothetical vein: suppose that, given the Canadian Western setting which is so suitable for romance, prairie writers are truly more at home in the romance mode than in the realistic mode. Suppose that their innate romance sensibility shows in a tendency to characterize ordinary men and women as types--embodiments of a view of life rather than replicas of life itself. Suppose that these men and women are deliberately endowed with a certain unreality so as to be more in keeping with the remote world they people. Types or not, these characters still have to speak; they cannot be left, like Grove's ploughing farmer, inarticulate. Then the proof-test for romance sensibility is in their rhetoric. If the characters' manner of speech is consistently remote from what we regard as the colloquial idiom--and by remote I mean either more lofty or more whimsically homespun or "folksy"--then the characters are surely closer to romance than to realism. Yet McCourt says that Grove's "inability to reproduce with even a measurable degree of accuracy the ordinary conversation of ordinary people" is due to his "lack of sympathetic understanding of his fellow man" (67).

McCourt is coming rather close to biographical criticism here. He says, "Because of his temperament Grove could never have been a great novelist. His autobiography,[34] In Search of Myself, is the story of a man who, whatever his physical experiences, lived remote from the centre of life. He views his fellow men intellectually, never emotionally" (66). It is not surprising that Winters makes the same kind of judgement of Hawthorne. He says Hawthorne "appears to have had none of the personal qualifications of a novelist . . . the sombre youth who lived in solitude and in contemplation in Salem, for a dozen years or more, before succumbing to the charms and propinquity of Miss Sophia Peabody and making the spasmodic and only moderately successful efforts to accustom himself to daylight which were to vex the remainder of his life, was one far more likely to concern himself with the theory of mankind than with the chaos, trivial, brutal, and exhausting of the actuality."[35] What I seem to be leading up to here is a small syllogism: Winters has a seriously limited view of Hawthorne because he fails to examine the author strictly in terms of the conventions he chose--and Hawthorne specifies romance conventions. McCourt's judgements of Grove are very much like Winters' judgements of Hawthorne. Therefore Grove must require critical analysis according to romance conventions. I recognize the vulnerability of my position here. In truth, reassessment according to different conventions will not salvage much of Grove, simply because he failed to control tone in his movements from actual spheres to imaginery spheres. Aesthetically, his most consistent work is The Yoke of Life, which is neo-medieval romance fused with Manitoba Gothic melodrama. It fails because the melodrama is somehow naked and embarrassing.

What I am suggesting is simply that, in approaching Grove's work, and the work of other prairie writers, the reader's accepted postulate--

"the contract agreed on by the reader before he can start reading"[36]—not be limited by what he has come to know as the fundamental principles of the English realistic novel. As Frye says,

> The essential difference between novel and romance lies in the concept of characterization. The romancer does not attempt to create "real people" so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. Certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. He needs the framework of a stable society, and many of our best novelists have been conventional to the verge of fussiness.[37]

I am unable fully to explain Frye's Jungian references. But, in the same way that external romance settings take us beyond the limits of perception—that is, beyond a world we can know directly through our apprehending senses—the Jungian archetypes provide us with a means of comprehending the internal fringes of consciousness. Jung's "collective unconscious" is a psychologist's term for the fountainhead of inexplicable impulses and urges that all humanity shares. Jung's terms are simply the sign-posts for the romance setting of the mind. But I do not mean to raise psychological issues. To get back to Frye: the key reference here is that the novelist needs "the framework of a stable society." It is the lack of such a framework that prevents the prairie writer from achieving complete success as a novelist. In essence, the prairie is frameless—land and sky that are empty and that, as McCourt suggests, draw the imagination straight into infinity; or woods that are impalpably luminous and grey, differentiated by shadings only, that, as Grove suggests, invite the imagination to take wing and glide. The setting remains frameless until the artist delimits it with a frame that matches the periphery of his vision. But when what he focuses on is empty and impalpable, the postulates of the novel are unsuitable postulates with which to scrutinize his picture of prairie life.

McCourt has an interesting way of getting around the problem of the lack of the framework of a stable society on the prairie. In the conclusion of The Canadian West in Fiction he writes: "The West is still very young. It needs time to establish a relatively stable economy; time to integrate the almost innumerable races and cultures that have found a home on its plains" (121). This statement surely implies an echo of an earlier statement wherein he indicates his ideal of the novel: ". . . the English novel has reached its highest point of artistic development in periods of comparative social stability--the first half of the eighteenth and the second half of the nineteenth centuries" (119). The point seems to be that, although the prairie novel is a little over a century behind the English novel, it, too, will reach a similar high point of artistic development. Now, by critical consensus, the English novel, at its eighteenth-nineteenth century zenith, with its own peculiar "set of conventions, devices and inclusions," is termed, simply, "realistic." And its aim, simply, is "the objective representation of contemporary social reality."[38] The English realistic novel is essentially an urban art form: in it, the facts of the community usually have priority over the fact of the land. Herein lies what, in McCourt's view, must remain as the crucial difference between the English realistic novel and the potential prairie realistic novel. Throughout The Canadian West in Fiction, he emphasizes the human community in relation to a unique landscape. True, since 1947, the prairie has undergone inevitable urbanization. But the fact of the land has not lost priority. In the epilogue to his 1968 publication, Saskatchewan, McCourt writes:

> There are parts of Saskatchewan where, as far as the eye can see, oil-pumps dot the fields and perform twenty-four hours a day their monotonous ritualistic task of drawing wealth from the depths of the earth; other parts where the great inverted cones of the potash mines hold the sky itself suspended; and still others where the sounds of the contractor's bulldozers and pile-drivers herald the coming to the province of a vast new industry--pulp and paper--and for at least one city a rebirth of expectation. But the man who has lived a long time in Saskatchewan, in city, town, hamlet, or country, and who has moved elsewhere, never asks about oil or potash or uranium or lumber; the question he invariably asks, and by which he invariably betrays his origins and his heart, is simply, 'How are the crops?'
>
> The association between the Saskatchewan man and the earth around him--whether one of love or hate--is intimate, intense, and he can never break it.[39]

The epilogue is entitled "Earth Abiding." Given this beatitudinal concept, and given the genetic question, 'How are the crops?', it seems to me that urban art forms are somehow beside the point. Yet it is precisely on this concept of the abiding earth that McCourt rests, not an assumption, but a hope that writers of the Canadian West will come into their own. The disintegration of nineteenth-century social and spiritual values has turned the English novel into "a literature of negation." But the conditions which resulted in the decline of the English realistic novel are precisely the conditions most propitious for the rise of the prairie realistic novel. The novelist of the twentieth century, says McCourt, "can do no more than re-create that desolation of the human spirit which is the time we live in" (119). And he concludes that, in this age of desolation, the prairie is now one of the few places that is "completely in harmony with the spirit of man" (122). So, realism in the prairie novel ultimately means full apprehension of desolation; and we are back to Lance-Corporal William Donkin of the North-West Mounted Police.

There is a sense in which what McCourt finally means by realism and what I mean by romance are much the same. Literature of negation is literature which presents a certain view of life--a view that involves "bewilderment and frustration and hope that hardly dares to be" (122). In order to evoke such a view, the novelist must work through his characters. And, if life is really as bad as he seems to think, then his characters will be embodiments of a negative view of life and, at the same time, they will be life itself. But when the setting is seen to be absolutely in keeping with the prevailing desolate spirit of the time, and when that setting is conceived of as eternally unchanging, like the sea, then the distinction between character and atmosphere or environment begins to blur. Set against the abiding earth, the objective representation of contemporary social reality serves only to underline the futility and innate vanity of all temporal things. The relationship between prairie environment and prairie character is indeed a subjective one, insofar as the land is sovereign. Like the court jester, Canadian Western man makes himself outstanding primarily by absurd, incongruous behaviour. McCourt provides an example of what I mean when he describes the town of Banff. In Banff, he says,

> Man has carried on the Creator's work with admirable discretion and good taste . . . With one exception. The Banff Springs Hotel sits overlooking the Bow Valley like a dowager duchess, an ageless relic of a bygone age casting an undimmed eye over possessions she shares with no one--not even God. The hotel was almost completely rebuilt in 1928, but the remodellers worked in the spirit of an earlier and more gradiose time. Sir William Van Horne, who insisted that the original hotel be built in imitation of a French château to honour the early French fur-traders (few of whom had ever seen a château), would have approved the present design.
>
> For those who can afford it--mostly Americans--the hotel provides all the amenities. But her chief value--impossible to think of a duchess as neuter--is as an act of defiance, a symbol of man's determination to impose something of himself, preserve his identity among the most awe-inspiring works of nature. Somerset

> Maugham has remarked that perfection is always a little dull; and perhaps the charm of the Banff Springs Hotel lies in her very incongruity--she adds the one essential touch of the freakish which prevents the perfection of Banff from becoming tiresome.[40]

Now, the prairie writer who seeks to show discreetly the essential harmony of spirit between God-created land and man, and at the same time show prairie man's innate nihilism and rebelliousness against nature, has set himself a difficult problem in characterization.

In part the solution to the problem rests in the fact that desolation in the setting need not be mirrored by utter despair or dull inertia in the characters. In Saskatchewan, McCourt says no one could survive the nine years' hell of the dust-bowl without courage or without faith--"not in a benevolent god but in one's own capacity to endure."[41] And he says that it is a matter of common observation that "the man who survives the prairie weather for any length of time is likely to develop, in addition to a chronic irritability, an alarming measure of self-confidence. By the very fact of surviving he has proved himself a man fit to whip his weight in wildcats."[42] Chronic irritability and epic self-confidence are excellent roots for the incongruous. So is the wry sense of humour which a stubbornly enduring race of people seems to develop, and which shows itself in the tall tales of the dust-bowl years.[43] It's the kind of humour that crackles quietly throughout McCourt's non-fictional prose: ". . . the Saskatchewan farmer's determination, once he takes action, to get something done in a hurry may be directly attributable to weather-conditioning. Outdoor plumbing in below-zero temperatures is conducive to hustle."[44] There is sufficient material for lively characterization, then. Endurance, irritability, self-confidence, humour--all these might be the elements that make up the general prairie human nature I have hypothesized about. But there still remains the problem of how to handle those expansions or contractions from the general to the individualized. Because on the prairie, these alternating modes have a high amplitude; they are radical. There are moments of epiphany when, from the top of a ridge or butte or even a grain elevator, "a man sees all the kingdoms of the earth stretched out at his feet and feels himself a creature of utter insignificance in the sum of things or else the very centre of the universe."[45] In order to show the first or the second or, paradoxically, both together, I think the prairie writer must be free to break the conventions of the conservative realistic novel; I think he absolutely requires the strategically revolutionary conventions of romance.

III

In the preceding paragraphs, I have been relying chiefly on American writers to provide criteria for a definition of romance. Not because I have assumed that American literature and Canadian prairie literature spring from the same roots, but simply because the American authors, especially Hawthorne, have been most explicit in their postulations about romance. But the question of form in the American novel has been engaged by several recent critics, among them Marius Bewley and Richard Chase. I regard their work as important because they both explore the reasons why the traditional form of the realistic novel was unsuitable for the native American prose artist. So, I mean to briefly summarize their view-points here, and indicate some of the similarities and the differences between the American milieu and the Canadian prairie milieu. First, Bewley states that during the nineteenth century, the American novelist was unable to work in the traditional mode because there was not yet a sufficiently developed social context in which leading ideas--"ideas, which, for the most part, were grounded in the great American democratic abstractions"--could be shown "with a rich human relevance."[46] Compelled by cultural isolation to find their own forms, American writers developed a mode which Bewley says is characteristically imbued with a sense of tension--a fundamental tension deriving from a split between abstract idea and concrete fact in the American experience. The tension manifested itself in various ways: for example, "it was an opposition between tradition and progress, between democratic faith and disillusion, between the past and the present and the future; between Europe and America; liberalism and conservatism, aggressive, acquisitive economics and benevolent wealth." In the writing of Hawthorne, the tension is between "isolation and social sympathy;" in Melville, between "democratic faith and despair;" in Cooper, between the American wilderness and the "new American industrial civilization." Poised in opposing pairs, these abstractions are the controlling factor in the motives and organization of a uniquely American mode which Bewley terms metaphysical or symbolistic. And he says that, where genuine artistry has been achieved, the characters presented in the works are usually, like Cooper's Natty Bumppo, beautifully realized symbols through which the author expresses his "highly complex reaction to American civilization."

Now the chief difference between the American experience and the Canadian prairie experience rests in the fact that, in Canada, there was no fundamental split between abstract democratic notions and concrete fact. Not simply because Canada was recognized as a mere, if gigantic, extension of the British Imperial Empire, but mainly because the settlers who emigrated from Europe to the prairie came with a full awareness that they would have to work very hard to make their own way. The public-relations pamphlets disseminated by the CPR were taken with a grain of disbelief, as I think the following passage from Kiriak's documentary Sons of the Soil shows:

> "Is there no limit to Canada?" Toma Wakar wondered irritably. "This is the fifth day of our trip and as yet there is no end."
>
> "So it seems," said Solowy, who sat beside him on the opposite seat from Hrehory Workun. "I don't see any fences, so I guess we've not reached journey's end."
>
> "Something tells me I'm going to be awfully lonesome for my lord's horses," said Wakar. He had been a coachman on an estate in the Old Land. "At any rate, a man was sure of food and shelter."
>
> "Don't fret, Wakar. This is not our part of Canada," Hrehory assured him. "Our destined place is more attractive."
>
> "In our allotment the fences are made of sausages, the roofs of bacon," Solowy jested. "All we need to do is lie back and eat our fill, and when thirsty we shake a birch tree and wait for the beer and wine to fill our cups."[47]

Most of the large groups of settlers--the Scots who came to the Red River Colony in 1811; the Icelanders who evacuated to the Gimli area after the volcanic eruptions of 1876; the serfs of the Austro-Hungarian empire who began arriving around the turn of the century--left the Old Country under duress. And about all they expected from the new country was a better chance in life for their children. Any foolish milk-and-honey notions were soon dissipated in the sheer effort of making a living from the land. But the common bond between the Canadian and American experiences is the fact of cultural isolation. On the Canadian prairie, the isolation was, in a sense, intensified because of the heterogeneity of racial groups who settled there. So, the Canadian prairie writer had, as possible leading idea, the Hawthornesque abstraction: isolation versus social sympathy. And he had not a sufficiently developed social context in which to show the abstraction with a rich human relevance. Nor has he, as yet. Again, the genetic question is still, 'How are the crops?' The "Nut Lake Lutheran Ladies' Aid" is still the archetype for the female social community; the curling rink with the cache of liquor by the back door is still the archetypal male commune; and the sports day, the auction sale, the barn dance, and the farm wedding still represent the quintessence of togetherness. There is a glow of frenetic, surrealistic, subjective intensity in Kroetsch's description of the barn dance in The Words of my Roaring--an intensity that takes it out of the realm of the real and into the realm of symbolic abstraction. And I think that the fact that Kroetsch is, to some extent, using his characters as symbols to express his complex reaction, not so much to prairie civilization as to the paradoxical relationship between prairie man and prairie land, is proven by his prophet figure. This little man, who smells like he "came right out of the farmer's armpit" and who looks like "a human dust storm,"[48] by his very presence makes of the auction sale something metaphysical.

My point is that, compelled by cultural isolation to find their own forms, prairie writers like Kroetsch have tended towards romance. I use romance here to incorporate Bewley's metaphysical and symbolistic because it seems to me that the author who uses his characters as symbols through which he expresses his highly complex reactions to life is the same as the romancer whose special perspective on life is conveyed through figures who are embodiments of a view of life rather than life itself. In The American Novel and its Tradition, Richard Chase keeps the term romance for the good and simple reason that authors such as Cooper and Hawthorne have stipulated the term. But Chase takes a different tack from Bewley on the question of why the American novelist has found the traditional mode unsuitable. He says that, usually, the English novel has been "realistic or, in the philosophical sense of the word, 'naturalistic'.[49] Yet even its gross poetic naturalism has preserved something of the two great traditions that formed literature. The English novel, that is, follows the tendency of tragic art and Christian art, which characteristically move through contradiction to forms of harmony, reconciliation, catharsis, and transfiguration."[50] In contrast, he says, the American imagination has been stirred, rather, "by the aesthetic possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder." Rather than having as motivating factor the impulse to close, through art, the split in American experience, the best American novels "achieve their very being, their energy and their form, from the perception and acceptance not of unities but of radical disunities." Like Bewley, Chase traces the fundamental disunities underlying American fiction back to fundamental contradictions in American life--the disparity between democratic ideals and actual political practice; the dualism inherent in Calvinism, with its "habit of opposing the individual to his God, with a minimum of mythic or ecclesiastical mediation;" the "dual allegiance of the American, who in his intellectual culture belongs both to the Old World and the New"--these are a few from a longer list. Under pressure of these contradictions, says Chase, the American writer has tended away from the novel, which is essentially a mediatory form, and towards the romance, which, "following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail," and is more amenable to the idealized representation of polarities.

On the Canadian prairie, there does not exist a similar pattern of contradictions. For the prairie attitude to the posed opposites catalogued above is paradoxical; or it is one of neutrality underlaced with hypocrisy or anarchism. By neutrality here, I mean that contradictory poles somehow cancel one another out. The prairie farmer stands in awe of

God, puts his faith in himself, is told to vote Liberal by his priest, and frequently sees his Protestant preacher go into politics. But in times of crisis, he casts about, searching, like Abe Spalding searches, for something to sacrifice to the powers that be, and thereby appease their fury. So, prairie piety is a curious blend of humanism, worldliness, and primitivism. The intellectual allegiance of the prairie man is just as difficult to specify. In the early pioneering days, he was likely to keep many of the traditions of his native country alive in the new communities. But these traditions have inevitably been modified by adaptation to a new setting. Unlike Hugh MacLennan's eastern ideal, he does not see himself as some kind of intellectual bridge joining the best of British and American elements. He might have gone to war for Britain, but not necessarily out of loyalty to the Crown. As McCourt shows, in Music at the Close, the armed forces were frequently seen as a kind of glamorous refuge from the sometimes enervating drudgery and hopelessness of farm routine. If high motives are to be imputed at all, they are likely to have derived from something more abstract than loyalty to the Crown: loyalty to the ideal of freedom itself. Since 1929, the fact that prairie economics are directly influenced by American trends has been recognized. But the prairie farmer is likely to feel himself slightly superior to his southern neighbour, whom he regards as too crassly materialistic, at the same time that he himself seeks to acquire that fifth section of wheatland. One of the few generalizations that can be made about him with certainty is that he regards Eastern Canada with suspicion, and considers the rains of British Columbia a little too soft. So, for the prairie writer, there isn't the impulse to present radical, irreconcilable polarities. Nevertheless, the prairie is no more suited that the United States to an art form which, following the tendency of tragic and Christian art, moves "through contradiction to forms of harmony, reconciliation, catharsis, and transfiguration." Because the sense of the Law--writ large in the rules of nature--is everywhere present on the prairie. God's presence there is primarily for the purpose of ratifying the order of nature. Although Christ might possess a genuine power of veto over the law, it is most unlikely that he will exercise it. So, the sympathetic magic of primitive religions which pre-date Christianity is quite conceivable on the prairie:

> The year 1937 brought the worst disaster of all. No rain fell, the wind blew what little top-soil remained in the fields into road-side ditches; dust-clouds--black, sinister, shot through here and there with eerie shafts of light--wavered all day and every day between earth and sky, and the heat was appalling. In Weyburn on a July day the temperature rose to 114 degrees above zero--a record which still stands. On the Moose Mountain Indian Reserve old Chief Sheepskin, nominally a Christian, summoned his braves to perform a rain dance. He died shortly afterwards, no doubt confirmed in the faith of his fathers, for the day before he died a heavy shower fell on Moose Mountain.[51]

To refer back to Frye: "the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns "[52] in a world closely associated with human experience is a romantic tendency. But, while mythical patterns add a subjective realm to the human sphere, they need not result in the complete transformation of that sphere from the human to the, as it were, animated totemic. The prairie writer cannot be a thorough-going romancer. He needs a form that is something of a compromise between total metamorphosis and stringent mimesis. For the characteristic pattern on the prairie is, not movement through contradiction to forms of harmony, catharsis, and transfiguration, but movement from paradoxical stasis--man is "at once nothing and everything, at once the dust of the earth and the God that made it"[53]--to some kind of resignatory compromise that represents man's best efforts to fulfil himself while maintaining his acquiescence to the Law. Set against the abiding earth, mortal man doesn't really change very much. Thus, in Music at the Close, Neil Fraser loses his romantic notions about women, about his own artistic aspirations; he becomes enough of a realist to admit to himself that he has gone to war because there was nothing much else to do; he knows that giving his life in the war will not result in a world at once unchained; but he dies affirming this much of an idealized abstraction: ". . . He and his fellows had made a contribution, however blindly, however unwillingly, to a struggle that might last a thousand years. Nothing he had done in his life before this day had any meaning. His death was the only justification for his having lived at all."[54] And Abe Spalding, in Fruits of the Earth, fails to be tragic because the catharsis that might be associated with his fall from the position of "tyrannos" of the little prairie-state he has created is dissipated by his compromising resumption of token leadership in the end. In As For Me and My House, Mrs. Bentley remains barren; but she becomes a compromise mother by adopting a child got by her husband with the Wordsworthian, Lucy-like Judith. And, as I have suggested earlier, Brian, in Who Has Seen the Wind, accepts the fact that he can never approximate the free-spiritedness of the Young Ben; but he compromises between the amorality of the prairie and the equivocal morality of the town by aspiring to be an earth doctor.

The most definitive exposition of a form which, in my view, is most suitable for the artistic re-creation of the prairie way of life in all its aspects is provided by Henry James in his preface to The American. He begins his discussion of form by posing a question: "By what art or mystery, what craft of selection, omission or commission, does a given picture of life appear to us to surround its theme, its figures and images, with the air of romance while another picture close beside it may affect us as steeping the whole matter in the element of reality?"[55] He thinks it must be more a matter of "perceived effect, effect after the fact, than of conscious design" on the artist's part. As if unconsciously, by his way of feeling and seeing--"of his conceiving, in a word"--the artist shows whether his values are closer to realism or to romance. The principal differences between the two constructs are epistemological:

> The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another; it being but one of the accidents of our hampered state, and one of the incidents of their quantity and number, that particular instances have not yet come our way. The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the things that reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire.

James goes on to raise, and dismiss, the features that other critics have regarded as typical of romance, and that, for the most part, are reducible to "the idea of the facing of danger." He says that the pursuit of danger is simply "the pursuit of life itself, in which danger awaits us possibly at every step and faces us at every turn." It is to make an inadequate distinction to say that realism projects the smallness of life's dangers while romance projects the hugeness, because such a distinction points up a difference in degree only, and not a difference in kind. So he essays this more specific distinction:

> The only general attribute of projected romance that I can see, the only one that fits all its cases, is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals--experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it and, if we wish so to put the matter, drag upon it, and operating in a medium which relieves it, in a particular interest, of the inconvenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all

> our vulgar communities. The greatest intensity may so be arrived at evidently--when the sacrifice of community, of the "related" sides of situations, has not been too rash. It must to this end not flagrantly betray itself; we must even be kept if possible, for our illusion, from suspecting any sacrifice at all. The balloon of experience is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are, and from the moment that cable is cut we are at large and unrelated: we only swing apart from the globe--though remaining as exhilarated, naturally, as we like, especially when all goes well. The art of the romancer is "for the fun of it," insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him.

The daily round of events and activities that make up prairie living is something we can know directly; and we can know directly whether the man of the prairie is successful or unsuccessful, happy or sad--although we might have to impute the reasons why. But the concepts which inform the most profoundly human realms of his being--concepts of metaphysics, psychology, ethics, and religion in all its aspects--we never can know except indirectly. And, in this regard, the prairie writer becomes the epistemologist. We know what he knows through his shaping of our perspective; through his control of the perceptual field. Given the lack--or, I should say freed by the lack--of a many-sided, intensively developed community, the writer has only the relatedness of man and land as the base of his explorations of intangible realms. I have tried to show that the prairie can be an ideal setting in which to launch the "commodious car of the imagination." But, in typical prairie fashion, prone to stern self-control and conceding to compromise, the prairie writer rarely, for the fun of it, cuts the cable--although Kroetsch lets it fray pretty thin. James sanctions compromise. He says that fiction is richest when the author commits himself in the direction of both realism and romance; "not quite at the same time or to the same effect, of course, but by some need of performing his whole possible revolution, by the law of some rich passion in him for extremes."[56] Chase does not see the complete Jamesian circuit that "passes through the real and ideal, through the directly known and the mysterious or the indirectly known, through doing and feeling"[57] in the best American fiction. So he uses James as a point of departure. I see in prairie fiction an attempt to keep the circuit unbroken. So I use James as a point of entry.

On the great empty plain, in the forest depths, when the wind is quiet and no birds sing. Nowhere, I think, is it possible for man to know better his littleness and greatness--that is, to know better himself. For this is a world which objectifies the great words, birth and love and death and God and eternity, casts them in a scale that exalts their grandeur and diminishes their terror.

--Saskatchewan

McCOURT AND GROVE: THE FAILURE OF REALISM; TENSION WITHOUT POISE

I

Gaunt. Will the King come, that I may breathe my last
In wholesome counsel to his unstaid youth?
York. Vex not yourself, nor strive not with your breath;
For all in vain comes counsel to his ear.
Gaunt. O, but they say the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony:
Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,
For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.
He that no more must say is listen'd more
Than they whom youth and ease have taught to glose.
More are men's ends mark's than their lives before.
The setting sun, and music at the close,
As the last taste of sweets, is sweetest last.
Writ in remembrance more than things long past:
Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear,
My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear.

--*Richard the Second*, Act II, Scene I.

Like all the literary allusions in Edward McCourt's *Music at the Close*, the allusion to Shakespeare that appears in the title and in several places in the text is important for a critical interpretation of the work. In his general introduction to *The Tragedy of Richard the Second*, Thomas Parrot comments that the play represents Shakespeare's "first really independent effort in the field of tragedy." Although the result is not altogether satisfactory, the play is significant because it shows clearly "the drift of Shakespeare's genius toward the creation of a new tragedy, the tragedy of character foredoomed to ruin which was to reach its climax in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*."[1] The story of Neil Fraser, central figure of *Music at the Close*, has one similarity to the tragedy of Richard II: Neil is foredoomed to ruin. And McCourt means Neil's personal tragic destiny to have an abstract, historic import. As the narrator says, "destiny is little more than a mystical term embracing the practical circumstances of environment and training."[2] Neil's immediate environment is a small farm on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River, somewhere near the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan. The developing action is, primarily, the activity associated with the farm itself, and with the near-by village of Riverview, although the scene shifts intermittently to a university campus, to a coal-mining town in Southern Saskatchewan, to Edmonton, and finally, to the Normandy beaches. But Neil is a child of the Wasteland generation. Therefore, the enveloping action, spanning the years 1918-1942, is not merely tangential. The Great Depression beginning in 1929 has an immediate and serious effect on the Riverview community; and its members are drawn as irrevocably into war as the rest of the world. Consequently, the "practical circumstances" of Neil's environment include global circumstances. Neil is foredoomed to ruin, not just because his nature is such that he can achieve success only in his daydreams--in the colloquial term, Neil is a "loser"--but because the value structure by which he wants to live is a disintegrating structure. In a sense, Neil is born too late. He represents an out-moded, nineteenth-century, optimistic belief in social progress, in Burkeian self-improvement, in Victorian chivalry and moral rectitude, and in patriotic self-sacrifice. With Neil as focal point, then, McCourt presents the social reality of an age in transition from hope to bewilderment and frustration. What he says in the conclusion of The Canadian West in Fiction--". . . the wasteland of the twentieth century is a far cry from the placid pastures of the Victorian age; and the novelist has followed the poet into the wasteland because he, like the poet, is concerned with the recording of experience and has therefore had no other choice" (119)--is directly applicable to his own work. His prairie novel is, presumably, universally understandable because the atmosphere of the prairie setting is completely in harmony with the now prevailing spirit of man. And I think it is McCourt's intention to have Neil articulate, in the rhetoric of his last thoughts, the harmony between the atmosphere of desolation in the land that has nurtured him and the spiritual desolation of the generation to which he belongs. In the words of Shakespeare's Gaunt, ". . . the tongues of dying men/ Enforce attention like deep harmony." So regardless of what thoughts have passed through Neil's mind prior to the concluding pages, we are inclined to take his last thoughts as truth--"For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain." And we are, therefore, conditioned to see the movement of the novel as ascension or rising emphasis; Neil's death is more "mark'd" than his life before.

I have already quoted an excerpt from Neil's final articulation of "truth." And I have hypothesized that, if the "ordinary" man of the prairie is to have a fully realized fictional life, he must be shown as he at least makes the attempt to understand some of the most profoundly human realms of our being. Well, Neil tries to answer what is perhaps the most profound question of all: what meaning is there to life? And his final answer is conceived of as a meaningful action:

> Nothing that he had done in his life before this day had any meaning. His death was the only justification for his having lived at all.
>
> And what was true of himself was true of those who died with him. Most men lived and died and left not even a memory of their ever having been. The world was no richer or poorer or better or worse because for a little while they had trod the earth and gone their way. History was made by the few. But occasionally the masses of mankind, stirred by forces they did not understand, impelled by emotions over which they had no control, threw their weight into the never-ending struggle and humanity moved one step nearer the fulfilment of an age-old dream. Strange that in the irrational, fantastic

> society of earth, war and war alone could justify the existence of countless millions who were of no importance, not even to themselves. (217)

"What was true of himself was true of those who died with him." Neil is speaking here, not just as an individual, but as a representative. He becomes an embodiment of a view of life, an archetype of countless unknown soldiers; and he symbolizes the "age-old truth working towards one or the other of the alternatives which it posed--that man be free or perish" (158). So, in the conclusion of Music at the Close, McCourt shows a marked tendency towards abstraction. And the tendency is by no means a sudden one. I will give evidence that it has been carefully foreshadowed. To speak generally, now: through the course of the novel, on an abstract level, Neil represents a changing view of life. First, he stands for the optimistic, nineteenth-century view that is now dispelled. Finally, he voices the Camusian view that life is bereft of meaning, but that each man creates his own meaning in the form of action which he acknowledges, or claims as if by fiat, is meaningful. If the novel had consistently presented Neil as primarily an embodiment of this changing view of life, it might have been a great work. But the novel is seriously flawed because McCourt tries to render a coldly objective picture of Neil, and an empirically objective understanding of the way Neil's mind works. Since the central figure is endowed with a thorough-going romance sensibility, objectivity must be achieved through irony. But, because of McCourt's incomplete mastery of narrative technique, it is not always possible to tell whether or not the narrator's attitude is, in fact, unequivocally ironic. The general narrative tone seems to be ironic--or realistic, if realism means showing the distinction between illusion and reality. And the point of view is generally as if through Neil's eyes, or as if from Neil's shoulder. Or it *seems* to be. The problem is that there is a strongly felt presence of a third-person, omniscient narrator, and the reader cannot always be absolutely sure if the narrator is speaking for Neil, or speaking independently in order to show Neil's wrong-headedness. With the ambiguity in point of view, the limits of the irony become ambiguous. Certainly, on an abstract level, there is irony in the movement from idealized, illusionary, nineteenth-century values to what might be called the "real," although relativistic, values of the present. And we are shown, in Neil's thoughts, that he is discontinuously but recurringly cognizant of the distinction between illusion and reality. But ~~the~~ conscious irony implicit in his recognition of the distinction is frequently offset, or neutralized, by the unconscious irony which appears in the interjections of the narrator. It is as if Neil has two separate imaginations. One is the inferior faculty, fancy. Each time that Neil has delusions of grandeur, each time he fancies himself to be more than common clay--either because he suffers more acutely than anyone else or because his aspirations are more lofty than those of anyone else--the narrator shows him for a fool. But his other imagination is the superior, creative faculty. It enables Neil to respond sensitively to his prairie milieu; it enables him to think of the circumstances of his dust-bowl days in abstract terms, to synthesize what he knows of his immediate environment with what he knows of the global environment. But Neil cannot be, at once, both the male, prairie version of Madame Bovary, and the true spokesman of the prairie-like desolation of his time--I am accepting as a given McCourt's concept of the desolate prairie as typical spiritual home of our desolate generation. By the time we read Neil's final truth "breathed in pain," we have been taught to mistrust the reliability of Neil's judgement. So, it is quite conceivable that his death-bed testimonial is not truth at all, but just another of his grand delusions.

I think that the simplest way for me to try to separate the conflicting ironies associated with Neil is to regard him as a character foredoomed to ruin on two separate levels--first, as an individual; second, as a representative of the lost generation--and then track the way in which McCourt shows the workings of Neil's mind on both planes. I do not think that McCourt intended his central figure's head to be regarded as some kind of open symposium for dialectic. But, ultimately, that's what it is. Neil has been given two distinct modes of thought, and one can be posed as the dialectical opposite of the other. It might be possible to see the two modes as the necessary elements of the paradoxical nature of the prairie man. But the typical prairie paradox does not insist that a man can be at once very foolish and extremely intelligent. The typical paradoxical prairie man has the intelligence and sensitivity to know that he is a mere nothing on the surface of the abiding earth, but that he is great because he works intimately with it. In any event, McCourt evokes his version of the prairie paradox quite successfully in Neil's role as a representative figure. I might add that a genuine paradox is only seemingly contradictory. We can see past the contradiction, and understand that the paradox expresses truth. But the composite effect of Neil's two contradictory modes of thought is to obscure the truth. So, if the issue of the "truth" of Neil's last thoughts is to be resolved, the two sides of the implied debate ought to be isolated and assessed. I think the weaker side is the side of realism, wherein, having endowed his central figure with a thorough-going romance sensibility, McCourt proceeds to show that his potential hero is simply unheroic. Neil is an ordinary man, "a

Miniver Cheevy or a Walter Mitty who is able to elaborate his dreams of glory only by ignoring the material realities of his station and his times."[3] His romance sensibility is established at the very beginning of the work, where the motivating principle behind his behaviour seems to be a lively imaginative response to things he has read. For example, when he first arrives on the prairie, an orphaned twelve year old from Ontario, he is afraid to leave his cap off while he drives with Uncle Matt to his new home because "He had often read about people getting sunstroke on the desert and dying in agony shortly afterwards, and he did not like to take any chances" (15). The fact that his lively imagination is going to cause him a good deal of mental anguish because it hinders him from coping squarely with reality, yet isn't powerful enough to efface reality, is also established in the first chapter. When he spends his first night alone in the attic-bedroom of his new home, he hears the lonely, haunting wail of the coyotes. It is an unfamiliar and terrifying sound, so he huddles in bed, repeats his prayers, and tries to make himself believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are really guarding him from harm.

> But Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were at best strangers, kindly strangers, no doubt, but remote from the realities of the present moment. Neil wanted his mother, not the angels of God. He tried to imagine her by the side of his bed, speaking softly to him, tucking in his sheet, perhaps, and telling him to sleep soundly. But his imagination was not strong enough to triumph over the reality. His mother did not come, would never come again. When he finally fell asleep his eyes were red and swollen and his pillow wet with tears. (23)

The strong sense of an omniscient narrator is also present from the early pages. When Neil spends his first day in a prairie school, he looks about and observes: "The schoolroom was small, the softwood floor stained and splintered, the walls bright with samples of art work more distinguished for violence of colour than evidence of artistic talent" (26).

This is the observation of a sophisticated adult; certainly not the translation into a child's language of a child's vision of his surroundings. The adult narrator's point of view appears more obtrusively a little later on. As part of the ritual initiation into the new school, Neil has to fight with his best-friend-to-be, Gil Reardon. Luckily for Neil, the fight is interrupted. The following passage, which registers his relief at the reprieve, also evinces his habitual tendency to fantasize, to imaginatively elaborate dreams of glory--it is a habit he never seems to lose--and it shows how he hates to surrender his dreams:

> Many times, in dreams, he had fought against boys older than himself. They had smashed him down, beaten him cruelly--at first--but always in the end he stood over his grovelling victim, bloody but triumphant, and listened scornfully to the mumbled apologies of the vanquished. But he knew that had he and Gil continued their fight, the ending would have been different. And he was troubled, not only because of what would happen to him some day, but because a dream which had been peculiarly real and precious had dissolved and vanished. (29)

After the deflected encounter with Gil, Neil joins enthusiastically in a game of "scrub." Sliding for homeplate, he rips the seat of his overalls from top to bottom. Later in the afternoon, he gets into trouble with the teacher, and, for punishment, is ordered to stand in the corner, his back to the rest of the class. Considering how he looks from the back, he promptly decides to flee the school. And here is where the narrator explicitly establishes his license to interject or imply the real reason behind Neil's behaviour, thereby deflating Neil's more lofty projected motives: "He was still in the grip of wild excitement, and he found the past half-hour magnificent to recall. In the face of the whole school he had defied Miss Piggott. His satisfaction was complete, since it did not occur to him that his defiance had stemmed from anything other than stern moral courage" (32). In other words, says the narrator, Neil has run away because he doesn't want to be the focal point of the whole school when his backside is showing. The irony here is obvious, and not nearly as complex as the irony in, say, Huckleberry Finn, where Huck seems sincerely to believe that he is acting against moral principles in helping Jim to escape, while in truth his "sinfulness" stems from stern moral courage. So it begins to seem that Neil's character is going to be easy to interpret; not so easy to warm to. As if to enhance the transparency of Neil's character, the narrator emphasizes Neil's romantic tendency to see people in outlines larger than human. Two things occur to entrench the tendency permanently: Neil discovers the wonderful, visionary world of nineteenth-century poetry and the escapist worlds of the medieval and historic-adventure forms of romance literature; and he meets Charlie Steele and Helen Martell.

Charlie Steele is a remittance man, strikingly handsome, suave, courteous, but a chronic alcoholic. Helen Martell, Gil Reardon's older sister, is the classic dark lady--hair black as midnight; eyes a deep blue, almost violet; skin incredibly soft and white; lips a rich crimson--but the focus of community gossip because she has been keeping company with Steele while her husband was off fighting in France. But the views of the community mean nothing to Neil.

> From that time on there were two great figures in Neil's life--Charlie Steele and Helen Martell. The people who surrounded the boy were for the most part common clay--or so they seemed to him--undistinguished in appearance or accomplishment. The instinct of hero-worship, always strong in him, had lately been stimulated by his reading, which had peopled his imagination with a thousand strange and splendid creatures of romance. Now when he read of Arthur and his knights it was not surprising, perhaps, that all the knights looked very much alike--tall and slim under their armour, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with little fair moustaches,--and that the women of Arthurian romance were tall and dark and red-lipped, with slender white hands and pointed

> nails. When Guinevere and Lancelot rode together they looked for all the world like Helen Martell and Charlie Steele. (56-57)

In later years, Neil idolizes Gil Reardon, Gregson the English professor, and what he feels to be the innate literary genius in himself. As he grows through adolescence into young manhood, his fantasies become more erotic. Helen Martell's place is taken by Moira Glenn, the teacher who succeeds Miss Piggott. And Neil's love for Moira is his twentieth-century approximation of Petrarchan courtly love. She is to be worshipped from afar; to be regarded as a visionary source of inspiration for great accomplishment. In his naked romanticism, then, Neil is totally vulnerable, and it seems that the realistic narrator will have an easy job of systematically reducing all of Neil's idols to common clay. As the novel unfolds, each of the figures Neil idolizes does lose the radiant aura that has enveloped him or her in Neil's first imaginative response. But the illusionary vision is not wholly replaced by a realistic view in Neil's mind. Instead, the figures remain symbolic, representing a shadow of what they once were, with a new, sinister, sometimes demonic aspect. One example should serve to set the pattern for the rest. Charlie Steele murders Helen Martell's husband. He flees for the river, and the whole community, but especially Neil, revolted at the thought of Steele's being hanged by the neck until dead, hopes he will get across the river and escape the Mounties. But Steele doesn't get across. Rather than surrender to the law, he means to kill himself. But he tells Neil: "Maybe if there was some other way of going, it would be easier. Death should come quietly--with dignity. There's something in Shakespeare that keeps coming back to me —something about the setting sun and music at the close. That's how it should be--music at the close. That's how I always thought it would be. Instead--" (68).

With his concern for his loss of dignity, Steele might not be conscious of the fact that the truth he is expressing here is the fundamental irony of human existence: man is born to live and so it's hard to die, but he is dying from the moment of conception. In any event, Neil never forgets Steele's words. And, since this is his first encounter with death, he is deeply impressed, and drawn to focus his thoughts not so much on the fact of death itself as on the manner of dying. As for Steele the idol, he is no longer regarded as the pure and shining knight; but Neil still cannot see him, objectively, as an ordinary mortal. His view of Steele remains intensely subjective:

> Long after the event, the death of Charlie Steele lived in Neil's memory with the vividness of a nightmare recalled immediately upon awakening. It stood out from the incidents composing the pattern of his life like a pillar rising from a great plain, dwarfing into insignificance everything that fell within reach of its shadow. And although Neil soon resumed his old pursuits with all of his former zest, deep within him there was a sense of something lost and irreplaceable--not Charlie Steele as he had really been in life, but the idealized conception that the boy had created for himself. . . . He still read a great deal, but the savour was not quite the same as it had once been. In the old days his imagination had identified the heroic and lovely creatures of fiction with Charlie Steele and Helen Martell, and now, tales of glorious deeds and lyrics of high romance too often served to evoke a picture that was never far from the surface of his consciousness--a picture of Charlie Steele sprawled in a huddled heap beneath the pine tree on the flats, his tortured, blood-smeared face upturned to the wide sky. (75)

The most significant "incidents composing the pattern" of Neil's life are all similar to the death of Charlie Steele in that they involve the translation of a fancied ideal into a Jungian ideograph--an image that crystallizes what is latent below the surface of consciousness. Perhaps what I mean by ideograph will be more clear from the following. When Gil Reardon is shot by the police as he heads a group of striking coal-miners on a march to the town hall, Neil is panicked into running "until his blood was pounding in his ears and his legs were like lumps of lead" (161). When he finally stops and rolls into a road-side ditch, he slips into "a borderland between sleep and tormented semi-consciousness." In this quasi-dream state, his mental image of Gil Reardon "on his back, arms flung wide, staring up at the pale blue sky with eyes from which the light had forever departed" is "clear and distinct, etched in blood" (162). The point is that Neil never learns to see the people who are most important to him in outlines precisely life-like; he sees them in suggestive etchings. During incidents such as the death of Gil Reardon, the omniscient narrator is unobtrusive. Although we are aware of the imaginative colouring of Neil's response to each incident, we are not distanced from Neil by ironic interjections. Given the prolonged inside point of view, we are persuaded to assent with Neil's response rather than to judge it as too highly imaginative and therefore unreliable.[4] The result is vivid psychological realism. But, the moment we begin to "identify" with Neil, he begins to seem less ordinary and more heroic, and therefore not in keeping with his individual role as male, prairie version of Madame Bovary. After all, on this latter level, Neil is foredoomed to ruin because his romantic imagination disables him from coping with, or facing up to, reality. And it wouldn't do for the objective narrator to allow Neil's handicap to get out of hand and be transformed into heroic potential. Accordingly, the narrator makes the empathy-drawing, prolonged inside point of view the exception rather than the rule. But the exceptions are nonetheless striking because their tone is anomalous with the prevailing ironic tone of the bulk of the work.

The narrator's irony is particularly pointed in the campus scenes. By the time Neil gets to university, he has seemingly become bitterly disillusioned about Moira Glenn, who has been easily seduced by Gil Reardon.

University turns out to be a disappointment too. "It had all turned out so differently from what he had dreamed" (120). Neil is attracted to Helen Milholland, a lovely blonde girl in his English class. She encourages his friendship, but he rebuffs her. "For however his reason denied it, he still clung to the dream that had Moira Glenn for its centre. He could not believe that she had betrayed him. But Helen Milholland had the power to destroy his dream. Her beauty and her charm were not illusory but real. And so, because he had no faith in the strength of his own loyalty, he ran away" (123). The narrative tone here, and in other similar passages, is the tone of realism in its didactic, reformist sense. The narrator isn't limiting himself to objectively describing the workings of Neil's mind. He has gone beyond description into prescription by implying what would be the truly noble, down-to-earth alternative to Neil's behaviour. As the passage stands, it is not meant to encourage us to identify with Neil. Rather, we are encouraged to judge him as a foolish dreamer without even the courage of his own romantic convictions. Not surprisingly, Neil's university career ends in failure. His English professor assigns as essay topic, "Dreams," which Neil takes as an excuse to "justify romance" (129). He is proud of his finished essay, but it is returned to him with the mark of "D." While Neil lies stunned and anguished by the mark, the narrator points out: "It had never occurred to Neil that anyone other than Dr. Gregson had marked the essay. Actually it had been marked by Don Hodgson, Gregson's assistant, who found in marking a convenient outlet for his innate sadism. Gregson, himself an incurable romantic, might conceivably have liked much of what Neil had written. But Neil knew nothing of this; for him, the verdict was crushing and final" (129-130). One of life's little ironies. Any student is apt to respond with: 'How like that is to what I know.' But again, our response is not to identify with Neil; rather, we regard him as pathetic.

After Neil's return to the farm, after he loses heavily playing the wheat market, after he witnesses the death of Gil Reardon, and after he finally marries Moira Glenn, there is some indication that Neil has at last been jolted into a more realistic outlook on life. But his newly articulated, cynical, self-derogatory tone turns out to be his own peculiar version of romantic irony. His "I haven't really got any illusions about myself" (194) is a verbal disguise, and we know it as a disguise, not because of so many narrative intrusions--the author now has Moira to frequently suggest that Neil stop living in the Middle Ages, and to frequently remind him that his failure as a farmer is his own fault and not nature's--but because of what the, this time, insidious inside point of view lays bare. For example, when Neil decides to prove to Moira his newly acquired realism by offering to burn all of his manuscripts, Moira is dubious; she thinks he doesn't mean it. "'But I do mean it!' he cried, jumping to his feet. Suddenly the burning of his manuscripts had taken on enormous significance. It would be a supreme act of renunciation, a beau geste of heroic proportions" (194). The irony here is implicit in the diction. Near to the closing chapter, McCourt rather awkwardly introduces a new figure in the novel. He is George Meeker, a kind of resurrection of Charlie Steele, and it seems that his only function in the novel is to give Moira an opportunity to be unfaithful to Neil, and thereby illustrate how Neil's wrong-headedness has caused him to lose everything. Neil knows of the infidelity, and his first, characteristic reaction is to daydream about how civil and courteous he would be--how "he would accept what happened with dignity and resignation. There would be no scene" (201). But, for once in his life, he begins to face reality squarely. He doesn't want to lose Moira, and he must bring himself to tell her so, without any false, self-sacrificial posing. Ironically, what is tantamount to his only attempt to really come to grips with a real situation is interrupted by the newscast that Germany has invaded Poland. For Neil, the war is a reprieve from reality. As Moira says, "So you're going to have your adventure after all" (210). Not that Neil is anxious to rush off to the Front. But his attitude is escapist. In the closing pages he admits to himself that he, and others, "had gone to war because there was nothing else for them to do. In a world that was drab, oppressive, hopeless, war and war alone had something worth while to offer--security, excitement, release from the deadly routine of marginal existence. For Neil himself it had offered a way of escape from difficulties that had been threatening to destroy him" (215). As if the narrator is aware that this excerpt gives indications that, uncharacteristically, Neil is being honest with himself, he goes on immediately to describe how Neil fantasizes about Moira, "who now epitomized all that was strange and thrilling and romantic in life" (215)--presumably because she is, by virtue of distance, completely remote from him--and about his young son Ian, for whom he dreams a university career, a Rhodes Scholarship, a sojourn "in the shadow of those grey old towers" (215) of Oxford. The moot question: is the mind of such a daydreamer a trustworthy repository of final truth?

Considered, not as an individual whose unheroic, ordinary humanness is proven to us by the inexorably realistic narrator, but as a representative figure, Neil does not fare so badly. First, as a prairie man, he shows how his growing apprehension of the landscape leads to a speculative indifference toward death. These are his observations and thoughts during Uncle Matt's funeral:

> The cemetery was a bleak, treeless patch of ground a mile outside town, situated on a rise overlooking the railroad tracks. Neil had always hated the sight of its desolation, with the new naked tombstones rising obscenely from unkempt patches of grass and weeds. Better, by far, he had always thought, an unmarked grave on a hillside or in a quiet valley. But today, when Uncle Matt was lowered into the earth, he did not mind. A cemetery lined with shady trees and crossed with well-kept avenues would have been out of keeping with the landscape. Between life and death there was a sombre harmony. And besides, it made no difference to the dead. (132-133)

To reiterate an earlier observation: to Neil, it isn't the fact of death that counts, but the manner of dying. Uncle Matt has died easy. All his life he has loved the land "with an inarticulate, single-minded intensity" (132). In life he has been on intimate terms with the earth; it is fitting that he should lie simply in it. The perceptivity Neil shows in this instance is somewhat undercut, two pages later, when Neil, in full charge of the farm now, begins to fantasize grandiose schemes about getting rich quick on wheat sales, and getting out. But Neil is simply illustrating one version of the prairie paradox here. He hates the drudgery that farming the prairie involves; but the prairie is his spiritual home:

> The prairie scene had for Neil something of the fascination that the sea holds for those who live close to it; a fascination not to be explained in terms of particular objects or contours or shades of colour, but of an harmonious combination of elements undiminished by detail, awe-inspiring in its colossal monotony. The plain over which the train was now passing stretched grey and golden to the horizon... (148-149)

The point of view here is purportedly Neil's. Again, it is a perceptive response, and, I think, an authentic one, if only because it echoes what McCourt has said in non-fiction, where he has no unheroic hero to portray. Through Neil, McCourt echoes himself again in the scene where Social Credit leader William Aberhart addresses the people of the Riverview community. To Neil, the scene is actually a spectacle

> --the spectacle of a people gripped by something approaching hysteria in the presence of the prophet of a new age. He had no power to look into the future; he could not see that the big man on the platform, enunciating a theory which sounded like wildest fantasy, would in fact be elected to office with one of the biggest majorities ever accorded a provincial party. . . . But seeing what was happening before his eyes, what had already happened in other parts of the world became not merely credible but logical. Here was a people, impoverished, frustrated, dangerous. Here was a man who promised them material salvation in the form of twenty-five dollars a month. How many in the huge crowd really expected to receive twenty-five dollars a month if the Social Credit Party came into power Neil had no way of telling; he suspected not many. But in Bible Bill Aberhart, the man with the pale expressionless face and the sleepy eyes, they saw leadership--they saw the prospective annihilation of whatever had been responsible for their frustration, and they were prepared to follow him with a kind of desperate trust in the wisdom and strength of the prophet because they no longer trusted their own. They were a people baffled, beaten but not passive, unwilling to accept what had happened to them as either the will of God or the consequences of their own follies. And in that refusal, thought Neil, lay the secret of their capacity to endure and to fight. (180-181)

This last is contemporary social reality, all right. But it is not tied solely to local, temporal particularities. For Neil has the mental power--it is almost entirely Neil's point of view here--to synthesize local circumstances with global trends. The picture of a people flocking to a new prophet is archetypal. And it is difficult to judge as one and the same the man who has the mental reach to conceive of such a picture and the man who conceives of the burning of his manuscripts as a beau geste of heroic proportions.

In articulating the connection between prairie prophet-seekers and prophet-seekers in other parts of the world, Neil becomes spokesman for his generation. His abstract function as a representative figure who indexes an age in transition is not very obvious in the early pages of the novel. But it is carefully introduced as Neil grows from adolescence into young manhood. The values he initially stands for are signalled by the authors he favours when he reaches physical, if not emotional, maturity. For the most part, these are Victorian authors, such as Tennyson and Swinburne, who speak from an optimistic belief in social and material progress, and from an antiquarian admiration for the chivalric ideals of the Middle Ages. More significantly, perhaps, there is also Rupert Brooke, the young English poet who died in 1915 while serving in His Majesty's Navy. Brooke is best known for his volume of sonnets, 1914. His war poetry fervently expresses the belief that to die for one's country is the highest honour. When he gets to university, Neil's "newest ideal--the man who immured himself from the world in order to pursue knowledge, who lived if necessary on potatoes and buttermilk in order to sit at the feet of some renowned professor" (121)--is Sir James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937). Now Barrie is a significant choice for Neil, not because he gives learning priority over meat, but because, in an age of drama dominated by the concept of social criticism, Barrie dares to bring the supernatural to the stage: Barrie is the creator of Peter Pan, the boy who refuses to grow up. And Neil is like Peter Pan insofar as he resists stepping out of the now naive world of nineteenth-century values into the "real," grown-up world of the Wasteland. Accordingly, Neil is offended by the virulent social criticism of H. L. Mencken, who "battered down whatever he attacked by sheer weight and noise. But much of what he said, for all its crudeness, seemed unanswerable" (128). And Neil no longer takes pleasure in his own "rigidly traditional verse" (128) after reading the Wasteland poet *par excellence*, T. S. Eliot.

Sensing the anomaly between his personal, antiquated values and what seem to be the entirely negative values he confronts in modern literature, Neil is bewildered and frustrated, and he begins to lose faith in the belief that this is an ordered universe in which human behaviour is governed by a tenable set of moral precepts. His now attenuated faith is badly shaken during the two days he spends in a South Saskatchewan coal-town, where Gil Reardon has been trying to organize a miners' union. Gil has become something of a freedom-fighter and a thorough-going idealist, with "the finest faith there is. Faith in mankind" (156). Neil envies Gil, and wonders if "he himself would ever find a faith, and, if so, would he, too, be transformed?" (157). He agrees to join Gil in the strikers' march on town hall, and it is during the march that his imaginative perspective is most penetrating and accurate. His interpretation of the events of the march consistently tends towards symbolic abstraction: "The automatons of the law were in motion--watchful, waiting, sinister in their inhuman detachment from the reality of the street and the sun-baked, shabby buildings on either side of them" (157). The miners themselves are really mere pitiful creatures seeking escape from the trap of their trade.

> But Neil knew that, on another level, what he was witnessing was an infinitesimal part of a struggle which encompassed all humanity. The handful of Saskatchewan miners, ill-clothed, ill-fed, mostly illiterate, with no comprehension of the real issues at stake, were moving blindly in response to a law of nature which impels man to fight his shackles as the wolf fights the trap which holds him. The procession now moving into town would create no stir beyond the limits of the town itself. . . . It would be an aimless, futile, exhausting exercise, fit object of derision--and yet, on that other level, something enormously significant. For it would be no less than a manifestation of an age-old truth working towards one or the other of the alternatives which it posed--that man be free or perish. (158)

Neil conceives of the march on three separate levels, then: the real, the primitive or animalistic, and the ideal. As a multiple concept, the strikers' march is freed from the temporal ties of local particularities.

Time-free, it becomes an archetypal event, with universal, eternal import. And, again, emphatically, the conception is entirely from Neil's point of view. The excerpt above is immediately followed with "So Neil mused as he shuffled along the dusty road--tired, thirsty, half-ashamed, yet held fast by the drama of the action of which he was a fragmentary part" (158). There is no ironic undercutting here. In his articulate thoughts, Neil becomes the legitimate spokesman of the event, and I do not think there is any doubt that McCourt intends us to take Neil at his word. For this is another major event in contemporary social reality. And McCourt's own innate romance sensibility shows in the fact that, through Neil, he presents the event, not objectively, but abstractly and subjectively. Throughout the chapter his technique verges on surrealism--the arbitrary juxtaposition of aspects of reality which have no logical connection. Surrealism is essentially a romantic art, a subjective art, because its paradigm is the dream, with its inexplicably mixed realities.[5] As the miners encounter the first line of policemen, the narrator says, "What followed had for Neil the reality and haunting terror of a nightmare" (158-159). And what follows is, like Kroetsch's barn dance, described with a subjective intensity that takes it out of the realm of the real and into the realm of symbolic abstraction. The miners are terrifying in their "sheer animalism;" the police cry out in voices "shrill, high-pitched, inhuman" (160). The climax of the scene is, not the shooting of Gil Reardon, but Neil's moment of epiphany, when he is about to bludgeon the policeman who has fired the bullet: ". . . he caught a glimpse of the policeman's face, the face of a terror-stricken, bewildered boy; and it came to him in an inexplicable flash of intuition that between miner and policeman there was no difference; both were caught in the same trap" (161).

After the death of Gil Reardon, Neil represents, on an abstract level, meaninglessness:

> He had loved to mouth the words of Brooke:
> These laid the world away, poured out the red
> Sweet wine of youth, gave up the years to be
> Of hope and joy. . .
> because in those days there had been things to live for, things that made dying worth while. But now neither life nor death mattered at all. And because they did not matter, Neil was filled with a kind of sick despair. (164)

As I have suggested earlier, in the subsequent paragraphs, sick despair becomes a cynical pose. Neil sulks; he wallows in self-pity. And the narrative tone reveals the pose for the paltry thing that it is. But if the subsequent pages are skipped, if the reader goes directly from the scene of the strikers' march and Neil's articulation of meaninglessness to the concluding scene on the Normandy beach, Neil's final affirmation--that each man makes his own meaning by informing his life with action he acknowledges as meaningful--can be regarded as unironic truth. For Neil, at the last, between life and death there is a sombre harmony. Now there cannot be harmony without form. The formal principle by which Neil makes an accord between life and death is very simple. Death becomes his only justification for having lived at all. Sombre, yes. But not out of keeping with his spiritual roots--"the great rolling sweep of prairie that was his home" (213). In one flash of intuition, Neil has come to know that miner, policeman, soldier, farmer are all caught in the same trap. In the conclusion, in another "flash of illumination," he knows that, were he to survive, he would simply "return to the farm and hover once more on the edge of failure, through long, dreary years that held no joy or hope" (216). This is not to say that he has now become thoroughly disillusioned. His romance sensibility persists, for he wants to die "a hero, a god as he now was," and he is glad he now has sergeant's stripes. "Not as good as being an officer, of course, but something to set him apart, if only a little way, from the common run" (217). This last sounds escapist again. And again, Neil's last affirmation of meaning might be nothing but rationalization. Still, I think his dying words "enforce attention like deep harmony." For, as a child, Neil has listened to "Ulysses," and the poem has engendered a vision of young and strong, bronzed warriors "landing on a shore that stretched far inland--a wide smooth plain giving way at last to steep hills and jagged crests. And through a pass in the hills he could glimpse the blue distances reaching, so it seemed beyond the borders of the world itself. The men advanced across the plain, spread out in a long, wavering line. Then the sun dropped behind the hills, and night shut out the scene" (48). When Neil lands on the Normandy beach, the vision recurs

> --of men spread out in a thin wavering line, advancing across what had then seemed to be a plain but was now no more than a narrow strip of beach, towards the high cliffs beyond. It was as if here on the Normandy beaches some plan of life decreed from his birth was reaching fulfilment. So Neil, his rifle gripped hard in his hands, went forward over the sliding sand and thanked God he was not afraid. . . (215)

The recurrence of the vision gives the novel a cyclical, and therefore harmonious, form. The conjectural "as if" introduces the concept of destiny; Neil is foredoomed. But, as the narrator has said, destiny is a mystical term. Not a term to associate with an unheroic hero.

By skipping many pages, I have avoided much of the deflation Neil undergoes at the hands of the realistic narrator, and therefore I find "destiny" a word quite appropriate in its association with Neil at the last. But novels are not meant to be read in grasshopper jumps, backwards and forwards, unless they are written, like Joseph Heller's Catch-22, in grasshopper jumps, backwards and forwards. Music at the Close moves chronologically. Consequently, my belief in the unironic truth of Neil's last thoughts is based on an arbitrary judgement that the novel is stronger on the abstract level than it is on the individual, realistic level. I suppose, by elaborate speculation, Moira could be the entity that joins the two levels together. After all, her name means individual destiny. If Neil hadn't married her, he might not have returned to the farm; there would have been no opportunity for her to be unfaithful, and he wouldn't have been able to dodge a show-down with her by going off to war. But there is no getting around the fact that McCourt spends a good deal of narrative effort repudiating the very imagination which enables his central figure to conceive of a prophetic vision which destiny fulfils. McCourt nearly approximates the Jamesian ideal. He does not sacrifice the related, community sides too rashly: Uncle Matt, Aunt Em, Johnny Watson--all of the minor figures are believable; and we are given an accurate picture of the rural community, and clear insight into the effect of the prairie environment on the lives of ordinary men and women. In Neil's free-ranging imagination, we might have seen the complete circuit from real to ideal, from what is known to what can only be known indirectly. But McCourt fails as epistemologist because his control, through Neil, of the perceptual field is erratic. I think McCourt has committed himself in the direction of both realism and romance--although he wouldn't use the term "romance;" he would be more likely to justify his tendency towards abstraction by asserting that, "because the spirit of the time compels him, the novelist today is concerned with the universality of man rather that his uniqueness."[6] But the novel fails because of his didactic realism.

In some ways, Neil is very like the central figure of Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, a story of the American Civil War. Perhaps an interesting study might be made of the comparison between the narrative techniques of the two authors. Crane's "hero" has a name, but he is typically referred to as, simply, "the youth," and so he has a representative quality. Like Neil, he has thrilled to tales of high romance in his childhood, and he has elaborated glorious dreams about his potential conduct as a soldier. And, like Neil's narrator, the youth's narrator insidiously mocks his dreams by couching them in terms that are inflated beyond credulity. During his first battle skirmish, the youth's vivid imagination conjures up such horrible pictures that he flees for the rear in terror. He has frequently wished he might be wounded so that he, too, would be distinguished by the "red badge of courage" that many hardened battle veterans bear. Ironically, he earns his wound, not in battle, but in a chaotic struggle with a soldier from his own side. The soldier is retreating as fast as he can from the front lines, and when the youth tries to stop him to question him, he clubs the youth with his rifle. Eventually, the youth returns to the lines and fights with appalling earnestness. But the narrator implies that his reputation as a "war devel" comes about, not because of the youth's manly courage, but because of his transformation into some kind of unthinking, barbaric, flag-worshipping savage. In the closing pages of the novella, the youth tries to rationalize his earlier cowardice and his reluctance to tell the truth about his wound. The following passage suggests that his days of childish dreaming and self-aggrandizement are over. He has been transformed; he has become a manly man:

> . . . gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance. And at last his eyes seemed to open to some new ways. He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them.
>
> With the conviction came a store of assurance. He felt a quiet manhood, non-assertive but of sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.
>
> So it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood and wrath his soul changed. He came from hot plowshares to prospects of clover tranquillity, and it was as if hot plowshares were not. Scars faded as flowers.
>
> It rained. The procession of weary soldiers became a bedraggled train, despondent and muttering, marching with churning effort in a trough of liquid brown mud under a low, wretched sky. Yet the youth smiled, for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking sticks. He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle. The sultry nightmare was in the past. He had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war. He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks--an existence of soft and eternal peace.

Now, given the consistently mocking tone with which the narrator has described the youth's previous, over-inflated pictures of himself, the reader cannot be certain, as he cannot be certain in Neil's case, whether this final transformation is to be taken ironically or not. The youth envisions "an existence of soft and eternal peace." Neil has dreamed of "blue distances reaching . . . beyond the border of the world itself." And the reader is left wondering if the author really intends the Edenic dream to be taken as a dream of credence.

II

In the concluding chapter of *In Search of Myself*, Grove remarks that he intended *Fruits of the Earth* to bear this title: *The Chronicles of Spalding District*. But, he says, the work "had to be ruined by a publishers' title when it appeared in 1933."[8] Grove doesn't explain exactly why he considers the publishers' title ruinous. Insofar as "fruits of the earth" might imply "we reap what we sow," the publishers' title appropriately suggests one of the most significant themes of the work. That is, whether he likes it or not, Abe Spalding is virtually the creator of the district which bears his name, and so he is responsible for it. The implicit imperative resonating throughout most of the developing action is: "You built it, Abe. Now you run it," whether the "it" is the district as a whole, or the huge Spalding estate on which the district relies for economic support. It is true that the concept of earth abiding, which might also be implied in the publishers' title, is for the most part a mere peripheral concept, since mundane or social affairs take up so much of the foreground of the work. And perhaps this is why Grove objects to the publishers' title. His original title is not so much a thematic index as it is an index of the form of the work. He presents, in fiction, what seems like an authentic historical narrative, a record of events in the order of time; or, in other words, he presents an objective re-creation of contemporary social reality in a municipal district in southern Manitoba, during the years 1900-1921, with particularities of local manners and customs rendered in great volume and detail. *Fruits of the Earth*, then, is in the realistic mode. And, for the most part, Grove adheres to the conventions and exclusions of realism. He purports to penetrate directly to life and reality, striving for verisimilitude and eschewing the "probable impossibilities" of romance. As a chronicle, the work is open to criticism of the kind Wellek generally illustrates in the following excerpt from Concepts of Criticism:

> . . . the pitfall of realism lies not so much in the rigidity of its conventions and exclusions as in the likelihood that it might, supported as it is by its theory, lose all distinction between art and the conveyance of information or practical exhortation. When the novelist attempted to be a sociologist or propagandist he produced simply bad art, or dull art; he displayed his materials inert and confused fiction with 'reportage' and 'documentation.'
>
> In its lower reaches realism declined into journalism, treatise writing, scientific description, in short, into non-art.[9]

There is, as McCourt has claimed, a good deal of documentation in Grove's work. What saves Fruits of the Earth from declining into non-art is the fact that Abe Spalding, almost always the focal point of the action, is a bona fide hero. He never seems to be an "ordinary" man; nor does he regard his occupation of farmer as "ordinary;" nor does he pursue his occupation in an "ordinary" way. But, despite the fact that his presence imparts a fictional or illusional quality to the documentary passages, Abe himself becomes a medium of practical exhortation and moral didacticism. Particularly in the second half, the work moves from description to prescription, and therefore fails as an objective recreation of contemporary social reality.

For more reasons than one. Thus far I have referred to Fruits of the Earth as if it were a pure example of the realistic mode. I do not retract the term now; the work's chronicle form marks it as closer to realism than to anything else. But, as I have suggested earlier, Grove's attitude to art is essentially romantic, and his romance sensibility shows most notably in "The Prairie" chapter, which serves as a kind of mystical interlude between the two parts of the work. Here, Grove evokes the prairie setting with the subtle tonal control he has shown in Over Prairie Trails. Momentarily, the atmosphere has that neutral, magical quality wherein the actual and the imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. So, for the space of the interlude, the whole tone of the work changes. It begins to seem that the sole point of the representation of contemporary social reality is to underline the futility and innate vanity of all temporal things. Momentarily, the concept of the abiding earth has priority, and the work becomes a more philosophical and a higher thing than chronicle. But, for some reason, as Part II unfolds, Grove all but effaces the romance vision he has so carefully engendered. Abe, who has taken an imaginary flight over the prairie and has gained an insight into cosmic cycles, is grounded again in temporal affairs. And our final view of him, as he resumes community leadership with a puritanical attitude that is so triumphantly reactionary as to be nearly incredible, seems completely incongruous with the view we have had of him on his imaginative journey into intangible realms. This is not to say that romance appears only in this single interlude. Elements of romance appear throughout the work, in the technique of characterization, and in the form of mythic metaphorical keys. Particularly in Part II, these last add a subjectivity that creates an ambivalence in the prevailing realistic tone of the work. It is as if the Jamesian balloon has been launched, all right. We get a clear glimpse of it only once; but we know it's up there because the rope remains visible. Yet, with so much to-do on the ground, we're not sure why it has been launched at all. I think Fruits of the Earth might have been enriched by the romance elements. I think its predominantly documentary flavour might have acquired texture and resonance from the romance elements, if these elements had been evoked with a better control and a more clear purpose. But Grove fails to maintain complete control as he, perhaps unwittingly, combines realism and romance. Whether or not he is aware that he has combined the two, he fails to provide the reader with a clear sense of the reason for the combination. Consequently, the reader has no way of critically justifying the presence of all the romance elements. Sometimes, their presence can be justified. But, generally, their effect is detrimental, for they divert the reader's attention from the main line of the work, and draw him along a side track that leads to a dead end. It is my intention to isolate some of these romance elements; to indicate how they function within the work; and to illustrate how, for the most part, they result in a sense of ambivalence.

In the first chapter, I have illustrated that Grove's technique in creating the character of Abe Spalding is essentially a romantic technique. Abe is archetypal. As a symbolic complex, he represents, not only the quintessential giant of a pioneer, but the essence of regency as well. In this last regard, Abe's "divine right" seems to be ratified by the gods of prairie nature. He is the destined "tyrannos" of the little prairie-state, Spalding District, and all the other figures are mere subjects. Hints of his sovereign quality appear from the early pages of the work, as, for example, when Abe enters the general store in the village of Morley, he is pictured standing beside the slick little manager, Mr. Diamond: "Abe's physical superiority reduced the other man to a mere satellite. He himself looked like a fact of nature."[10] By the end of Part I, we know that physical superiority typifies superiority in farm-business acumen, superiority in municipal political acumen, and superiority in moral integrity. As a leader, Abe is neither passionate nor oratorical. He is cool, reticent, stand-offish, and above all, efficient. As for his personality on what might be called the individual, ordinary human level, the following passage, an interchange with his sister Mary, gives a fairly complete indication of what he is like. Abe has stopped at Mary's house, and she offers him tea.

> 'You won't stay? Not for half an hour?'
> 'I can't. Work's waiting.'
> 'It's Saturday. Other farmers have time.'
> 'They!'
> 'How's the baby?'
> 'All right as far as I know.'
> 'Ruth?'
> 'The same.' (29)

In addition to showing Abe's contempt for other farmers, this brief interchange shows how little interest Abe has in his family. The members of his family, like Mr. Diamond and the other "subjects," are mere satellites. And, for the most part, all the satellites, filial or otherwise, are presented as caricatures rather than as complete human personalities. Many of them are distinguished simply by certain physical signatures, and they represent a single, elementary abstraction. They are like Abe in that they illustrate Grove's tendency to characterize his figures according to the conventions of romance rather than according to the conventions of realism. But, although they are abstract and elemental, their presence in the work can be justified. So, before I resume the discussion of Abe's character, I mean to offer a sampling of the minor figures; to suggest what they represent; and to suggest why they are not out of place in their milieu.

Abe's brother-in-law, Dr. Vanbruik, whom Abe frequently seeks out for advice, and who seems to represent wisdom and humanism, has a small physique and a diminutive face. "It looked contracted, as if its owner lived in a perpetual concentration of thought" (28). His characteristic physical gesture is to draw his right foot up to his left knee, and, with his free hand, nurse its ankle. Old Mr. Blaine, the teacher Abe hires for the first school in the district, has a leonine head "disproportionately large for his body, and a sandy beard streaked with grey disproportionately large for his head. When he turned, one was oddly reminded of a lion turning in a cage" (57). In one instance, during the Great Flood, when he is powerless to help himself and must wait to be rescued, he appears standing on the school step, stooped "under the weight of his head, unconscious of the cold drizzle which interposed a veil of mist between him and the men, so that he looked like a creature of mist" (69). Now Mr. Blaine is a first-rate teacher, and he seems to represent the spirit of learning for its own sake. When he appears as if caged, or veiled away in mist, he bespeaks how alien the concept of a liberal arts education is to the prairie. Abe's only surviving son, Jim, learns on his own to be a journeyman, a mechanic. And he is drawn to the trade as an indirect result of school consolidation. All of the rural students are taken from their first prairie school to a central, urban composite school, and it is inevitable that they begin to learn the ways of the town. Abe fights consolidation because "he felt in this innovation the approach of an order in which the control of the state over the individual would be strengthened through a conformity against which he rebelled. The scheme was in keeping with the spirit of the machine age: the imparting of information would be the paramount aim, not the building of character; spiritual values were going to be those of the intellect only" (155). Regarding Jim, Abe articulates in thought, "This boy of his had the spirit of the machine" (172). So it seems that Jim's physical signature is an index of his spirit--an effectively revealing index, for the signature is repulsive: Jim's "large, prominent ears showed a peculiar deformity: their lobes pointed horizontally forward . . ." (152). The most intriguing of the minor figures is Mrs. Grappentin, the elderly Mennonite lady who, in 1910, comes to join her son, who has homesteaded in the district. "Mrs. Grappentin became a frequent visitor to most farms in the district. Vigorously she strode over the prairie, a grotesque sight, for she was lean and ugly and resembled the idea which children have of a witch in the woods" (65). She is indefatigably mendicant, a vicious gossip, and she hates Abe with an inexplicable intensity that makes the mere envy or jealousy many others feel towards him seem like actual affection in comparison. She plays the role of Abe's evil genius, and she seems to represent an embodiment of an evil spirit of the prairie itself. Thus, in the concluding section, when the whole district knows that Abe's young daughter is carrying a bastard child, she calls out to Abe and his wife Ruth as they speed past in their buggy: "'Is the great lord stepping down from his shining height? Now he's got a whore in the family like other common folk?' And she broke into a cackling laugh, waving her hand after the buggy in the greeting of fellowship. . . . A shudder ran down Abe's spine at the sound; and Ruth paled. The voice, unintelligible though it was, sounded like the voice of the prairie which lay swooning under the afternoon sun" (261-262).

All of the minor figures are, like the figures in Ross's As For Me and My House, essentially static. We know pretty well as much about them when they first appear as we know at the end of the work. But, in themselves, they do not really contribute to the ambivalence in tone. For, with perhaps the exception of Mrs. Grappentin, they can all be regarded as, simply, social types without any universally human quality. They have their counterparts in, say, George Eliot's Middlemarch, where the community itself seems to acquire a personality as it develops and changes; or, closer to home, they have their counterparts in Niven's The Flying Years, in which the whole of Western Canada "grows up" and develops a unique character. It is the Spalding District that matures and changes in Fruits of the Earth; and, since the district is a kind of macrocosmic extension of Abe, presumably he changes as well. But Abe seems to have two sets of "relatedness"--one with the land, and one with the district. It is the somehow aimless metaphysical quality of the first relationship that yields a sense of something out of tune in the second. This is not to say that there is a sense of dissonance in the early pages of the work. Abe's motives in coming to the prairie are clearly stated. He is a man "possessed by 'land hunger' . . . a man of economic vision" (17). He has "deliberately chosen the material world for the arena of his struggles" (18), and he feels the open, empty prairie will give scope to the powers he feels within him. However, he is not imperceptive of the uniquely strange character of the landscape. As he drives his team to his homestead stake, he remembers how, in the preceding year when he had come West to scout for land, he had scanned the district from a purely utilitarian point of view. Now, momentarily setting aside economic considerations, he widens his view, and the very strangeness of what he sees is challenging:

> . . . this prairie seemed suddenly a peculiar country, mysteriously endowed with a power of testing temper and character. But that was exactly what he had wanted: a 'clear proposition' as he had expressed it, meaning a piece of land capable of being tilled from line to line without waste areas, without rocky stretches, without deeply-cut gullies which denied his horses a foothold.

> He wanted land, not landscape; all the landscape he cared for he would introduce himself. . . . this immense and utter loneliness merely aroused him to protest and contradiction: he would change this prairie, would impose himself on it, would conquer its spirit! (23)

This last is tantamount to hubris. And I think Grove is deliberately fusing into a kind of hybrid form the classic form of tragedy and the chronicle form in this work. As he remarks in another passage of In Search of Myself, his encounters with pioneers affirmed in him a "conception of what often takes the form of a tragic experience; the age-old conflict between human desire and the stubborn resistance of nature. Order must arise out of chaos; the wilderness must be tamed."[11] Although the denouement takes much longer in Fruits of the Earth than in traditional tragedy, and although, as I have suggested earlier, there is no traditional catharsis, Abe certainly pays for his pride in the concluding chapter of Part I, when Charlie is killed. But for now, the wrath of the gods is held in abeyance. Abe begins to plough as soon as he reaches his chosen land. And, as he works on well into the dark of evening, he is pictured in cosmic harmony with the earth itself: "A slight mist formed close to the ground, and he had the peculiar feeling as though he were ploughing over an appreciable fraction of the curvature of the globe; for whenever he turned at the north end of his furrow, he could no longer see his wagon, as though it were hidden behind the shoulder of the earth" (25).

The next few chapters are a record of tireless work on Abe's part; of growing estrangement between Abe and his wife Ruth, who can't understand what motivates Abe to work so hard; and of the gradual accumulation of settlers in the district. Abe makes a life-long friend of Nicoll, who, throughout the work, serves both as Abe's most loyal second, and as a foil for Abe's powerful character. While to Abe, "the world was a thing to be conquered, waiting to take the impress of his mind and will, Nicoll seemed rather to look for a niche to slip into, unnoticed and unobserved" (36). "Nicoll's Corner" becomes the social centre of the settlement, where "all affairs that concerned the district were discussed, besides many questions concerning God and the universe" (59). As I have said, it is not true that farmers have no time to think about profound things. But Abe rarely participates in the discussions. For one reason, he believes he can't afford the time. For another, he is a materialist, which means he regards self-interest as the first law of life, and he regards matter and its motions as constituting the universe, and all phenomena, including those of the mind, as due to material agencies. Consequently, he feels "uncomfortable when facing fundamentals" (40) such as the idea of life after death. As a result of Abe's obvious ambitiousness, and as a result of Mrs. Grappentin's gossiping about the outrageous prices Abe has supposedly paid for each new piece of land he buys, Abe rapidly becomes something of a legend in the district. His position as natural leader is firmly established during the Great Flood, when he guides the district through a dangerous and chaotic time. All of the men who struggle to replace the flood-driven culverts are described as "heroes and giants fighting the elements" (70). But Abe, especially, because of his seeming wealth and "magic success," is regarded as "a huge figure of somewhat uncertain outlines, resembling the hero of a saga" (85). In this instance, the mythical references are not incongruous with the tone of the work. Abe is simply being marked, in every possible way, as extraordinary. His election to municipal council comes as no surprise, and he becomes the undisputed, although rather unpopular, official ruler of the district.

It is in the section which describes how Abe is "consciously working up to a grand climax in his farming operations" (80) that a diverting romance element begins to intrude in the work. For the section has a subtly mystical, numerological tone. In order to prepare for the "grand climax," Abe has carefully planned a summer-fallow cycle. The way the plan works,

> periodically there would be one year in every twelve when no fallow was needed. On such a year he counted for the realization of his bolder dreams; and it would come for the first time in 1912. Whenever he thought of it, he was visited by fears. Not all years yielded equally well; it depended on the sort of season it happened to be. To work for eleven years in hope of getting the proper return for his labour in the twelfth was plainly in the nature of gambling. If that twelfth year was a year of subnormal yield it would prove disastrous. In order to put in a crop of twelve hundred acres, he would either have to have a considerable reserve of capital or to strain his credit to the breaking point. Yet he had been lucky so far; he must count on his luck to continue. (80)

The mystical number, then, is twelve--an appropriate number because, since the earliest days of earthly civilization, the duodecad has been the symbol for a completed cycle of the astrological wheel.[12] Grove's use of twelve implies Abe's wish to have the climax of his farming operations coincide with the culmination of an astrological cycle. Hence, the ethical construct resonating in this section of the work is a primitive construct. By primitive here, I mean the simple, earthy quality of civilization's earliest agrarian communities, wherein man derives his behavioural precepts from mimesis of natural astronomical cycles. The sense of primitive, cyclically-based ritual patterns is enchanced later on, when Abe has his twelve hundred acres seeded:

> The weather was singularly propitious; but the more propitious it seemed, the more Abe worried.
>
> He had heard it say [sic] by the old-timers from south of the line that wet years run in threes, as do dry years, with one

> normal year completing a seven-year cycle. A few of the weather-wise even went so far as to say that, the first year, it was the spring which was wet; the second year, it was the summer; the third year, it would be the fall; and the year 1911 had borne them out. Neither a wet spring nor a wet summer did Abe any harm. . . . If the prediction of the old-timers came true, the wet weather would come in the fall--the only time when it could ruin him. (90-91)

In this last, the reference to seven strikes a mystical note, because seven, like twelve, has a long history as a symbol of the relationship between temporal and cosmic spheres. For example, according to the principles of Pythagoras, "7 beyond 6 = rest after work; 8 beyond 7 = eternity after mutability."[13] It is interesting that, after Abe has successfully harvested his massive crop, and after the death of his eldest son results in his taking a closer look at "fundamentals," the concept that he attempts to probe most deeply is the concept of mutability. As for his present concern about the weather, Abe's acceptance of the validity of what the old-timers say does not seem unnatural. It is not until Part II that, in retrospect, the earthy custom of deriving behavioural precepts from the cues of nature seems somehow anomalous. For, in Part II, certain references keep the primitive ethical construct resonating in the background--for example, in the fourth-to-last chapter, Abe is described in the midst of haying activities: "At this northern end of the meadow, the grass contained an admixture of skunk-tail the seed of which was annually spread by the flood; and the barbed awns of the grassy weed were sticking in his hair and eyebrows, giving him the hoary appearance of some rustic harvest god" (228)--yet the ethical precepts by which Abe justifies his final tyrranical actions are clearly derived from bourgeois, petty puritanism.

Abe has been explicitly described as a materialist. But the narrator shows that, throughout the summer of 1912, Abe's thoughts belie his supposed non-belief in supernatural realms: "Unless some major disaster interfered, this crop would place him at the goal of his ambitions. But could it be that no disaster was to come? He felt as though a sacrifice were needed to propitiate the fates. He caught himself casting about for something he might do to hurt himself, so as to lessen the provocation and challenge his prospect of wealth must be to whatever had taken the place of the gods" (98). The phrase "unless some major disaster interfered" or its equivalent is reiterated at least four times in the space of two pages, so it comes as no surprise that, just before the fall swathing is completed, "a slight rain fell like a warning" (101). Abe's prescience of disaster drives him frantic, but there doesn't seem to be anything he can do to save his crop. Unless he has supernatural help. Now, commenting on Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* in a section of *In Search of Myself*, Grove says: "In Hamsun's book I came to see a think I abhorred, namely, romanticism; which means essentially a view of life in which circumstance is conquered by endeavour only if endeavour is aided by the *deus ex machina*. In other words, as I expressed it to myself, if man is justified by faith instead of by works; or if faith persists in the face of the strongest disproof and is ultimately upheld by an external intervention, natural or supernatural."[14] In *Fruits of the Earth*, Grove's narrative technique is in direct contradiction with this aesthetic fastidiousness. For it is clearly implied that Abe does indeed have supernatural help in saving his crop. The day the solution to his problem strikes him, he is described as keeping himself uselessly busy.

> Always he had thought faster and to the best effect when at work. He could never grasp all the bearings of a problem sitting down; at work, difficulties seemed to solve themselves as by magic.

> Thus, having done the chores at the barn, all but the milking, he climbed into the loft, taking a lantern, to throw down hay for the day; and, happening to look into the grain bin, he saw that there was little oats left near the chute. He climbed in and, with a half-bushel scoop, shovelled the grain over from the talus-slopes of the margin.
>
> Suddenly he straightened under the impact of a thought.
>
> Yes, he would stack his crop! (102)

"As by magic." The notion of stacking unthreshed sheaves of wheat is unheard of on the prairie. But Abe begins to carry out his novel plan with "superhuman exertion." His excitement is contagious, so the farmhands he hires match his feverish pace. "In routine work nobody would have exerted himself; but this was so quixotic that work seemed sport or play" (104). The stacking is finished on the 25th day of September. Next day, the rains come. In the district, people are more excited over the fact that Abe has saved his crop than they are disappointed about losing theirs. "What I'd like to know," says Henry Topp, "is how he could tell." Someone suggests, "He had the luck" (107). "But it was left to Mrs. Grappentin to find the true solution of the problem: Abe was in league with the devil, or he would never have thought of stacking" (108).

A clever criminal lawyer plants a suggestion that stays in the minds of the jurors even after opposing counsel has objected, and the objection has been sustained by the judge. Mrs. Grappentin's "true solution" might be intended ironically. But it is reinforced by an almost exact echo of circumstances and speculations in Part II. In 1921, the only crop worth money is hay, and the district has hay in abundance. But the ground is so wet that the hay can't be cut, and the high grade of the road keeps the water from draining. Abe's hay land is higher above sea level than anyone else's, but he can't reach it with farm machinery until, amazingly, one night the grade breaks, and Abe's land is left high and dry. "It was unnatural; it could not be. Was he possessed of superior powers? Or had he gone by night and opened the road? Mrs. Grappentin said you could weaken a dam by thinking of it. The devil would do the rest" (226). So, the implication that Abe has a direct relationship with the evil spirit of the prairie is never completely overruled. In several instances in Part II, Abe is described in terms which suggest he has a direct line of communication with supernatural spheres that are not necessarily demonic. For example, during the plebiscite to decide the issue of school consolidation, when Abe is barred from voting because his arch-opponent Wheeldon has uncovered the fact that Abe hasn't paid his last year's taxes, Abe is pictured at battle-ready: "A storm of impulses raced through Abe's mind. As if he were reaching out into the universe for a cosmic weapon to strike his opponent down" (165). In this instance, the spiritual power Abe seeks is clearly destructive. In another instance, his whole being seems to be in harmony with the spirit of prairie chaos. A furious blizzard strikes the district, and Abe is too restless to stay inside the house. As he is making his way about the farm-yard, the narrator vividly describes his stormy milieu. Here is an excerpt which shows Abe's essential unity with the spirit of nature:

> Even though the poplars stood bare and leafless, the wind bent and twisted them, straining at every twig and bough, whipping their swaying tops. Everything that could move moved under the impact of that aerial turmoil; everything that could rattle rattled; and since trees and timbers were frozen to the core, the sum total of the sounds produced was that of a dry feverish chatter which set the nerves on edge as though things had a sort of insane voice of their own. The twigs which broke in the girdle of trees snapped with the splintering crackle of rifle fire. When, in a down-sweep of the captured air, the hard, fine granules of the snow, which had no trace of their

> crystalline structure left, hit the ground or the roofs of the lower buildings, they did so with a swishing sound. And to all that was added the music of the air itself which, like a floating shroud, kept swinging and swaying.
>
> Abe's powerful physique enjoyed the flooding turbulence as others may enjoy a dip through rolling breakers of brine. (203)

So, Abe has implied associations with the devil, with cosmic destructive forces, with chaos, and, since in this last the prairie air is like a floating shroud, with death. The composite effect of these associations is to make him a symbolic index of the darker spiritual side of the prairie. But he has his brighter associations, too, as the earlier reference to him as a "rustic harvest god" shows. As a symbolic complex, then, Abe represents the Manichean forces present in nature. But, while the fact of his metaphysical quality is clear, the point of it is not. If Abe speaks for the prairie, he ought to speak, in rustic parables, of the eternal cycle of the work of the seasons--"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." Or, since his soul exults in the chaos of a prairie storm, and the very turbulence of the elements rouses him to challenge, he ought to be the voice of anarchy, the voice of revolt against the inscrutable powers of nature. Above the rolling breakers of the snow, he ought to speak, like Ahab speaks, above the rolling breakers of the brine:

> Were I the wind, I'd blow no more on such a wicked, miserable world. I'd crawl somewhere to a cave, and slink there. And yet, 'tis a noble and heroic thing, the wind! who ever conquered it? In every fight it has the last and bitterest blow. Run tilting at it, and you but run through it. Ha! a coward wind that strikes stark naked men, but will not stand to receive a single blow. Even Ahab is a braver thing--a nobler thing than that. Would now the wind but had a body; but all the things that most exasperate and outrage mortal man, all these things

> are bodiless, but only bodiless as objects, not as agents. There's a most cunning, oh, a most malicious difference![15]

Instead, Abe speaks as the wise and sternly upright father-figure in a comedy of manner. The characteristic movement in comedy is towards a moral norm--towards a state of social affairs that most everyone in the society has known all along is proper and desirable.[16] Now there is nothing funny about Abe's role in the conclusion of Fruits of the Earth. But his function is either to expel or to effect a change in whichever characters are blocking the movement towards a normalized, morally proper society. The events leading up to the longest and most self-righteous monologue he delivers in the work can be summarized quickly. After Abe's disgrace over his disqualification from voting in the consolidation-issue plebiscite, Abe withdraws from local politics. With its natural leader virtually absent, the district begins to go awry. The moral corrosion that begins when the young people are sent to the urban composite school is enhanced by the return of many young fellows who have fought in World War I. These devil-may-care young blades are referred to, simply, as "the gang." They take over Mr. Blaine's old schoolhouse, which becomes the prairie equivalent of a speak-easy, and the focus of community gossip.

> The complaints centred around the use to which the old school was put. Nicoll spoke of unbearable scandals. In spite of nation-wide prohibition liquor flowed freely at these dances which had become weekly, even twice-weekly affairs. Worse things were mentioned. Seeing that these meetings were sponsored by returned men, a number of farmers, including Nicoll, had allowed their daughters to go. Some, like the Ukrainians, having once allowed it, found themselves unable to stop it. Girls from other districts came in: undesirable elements from town and city. To his amazement Abe was told that three or four children had been born out of wedlock; more were expected; the dances had degenerated into drunken orgies. (212)

I think the moralistic, prescriptive rather than descriptive tone of this passage is obvious. The narrator goes on to describe how, since the war has unsettled men's minds, people are becoming dissatisfied with their lack of material possessions. "A tendency to spend recklessly and to use credit on a scale hitherto unknown was linked with a pronounced weakening of the moral fibre. . . . Girls wore silk stocking, silk underwear, silk dresses; and nothing destroys sexual morality in a girl more quickly than the consciousness that suddenly she wears attractive *dessous*" (223). Several district members plead with Abe to get him to step in and take affairs in hand. For a while, he adopts an "I told you so" attitude. But his youngest daughter Frances is seduced by one of "the gang," Abe's own hired hand, McCrae. Ruth is afraid Abe will murder McCrae when he finds out that Frances is carrying McCrae's child. So she says, "Abe . . . for my sake, let him go." But Abe has thought the matter over carefully, and he realizes wherein his duty lies.

> He placed his hand on hers which rested on the table; and for the first time in many years, he felt her touch on his shoulder. 'I can hardly do that,' he said with an effort. 'He is not alone in his doings. And this is my district, founded by me and bearing my name. Shall his example stand for all time to come? What would it mean? That a man can do as he pleases, living the life of the beast within him. If Frances was in any way to blame, that is her concern. But McCrae is not a giddy boy. If he were, I'd make him marry the girl and keep him straight. But look at the case. He is married. He has children of his own. He is a ratepayer, entitled to office if he can muster followers enough to elect him as Wheeldon did. He enjoys all the rights and privileges of others. Has he none of their duties? I had withdrawn from the district; I did wrong; and this has risen up against me. I see my duty again. It is out of cases of self-help that the law has arisen; whatever I do will have its effect on the law; or at least on its interpretation within this district. No, I shall have to act. I shall have to drive him out.' (264)

Abe's words ring with moral rectitude. He is meant to sound most manly; but he sounds most pompous. That evening, he strides to the schoolhouse, interrupts the drunken orgy, demands the key to the building, and decrees, "'This building is closed.' He looked like an irresistable force of nature; and his composure seemed uncanny" (265). Given the way in which Abe has previously been associated with the forces of nature in fitful passages throughout the work, and given the kind of moral construct from which he has just spoken, I find this last conjectural description of him as an irresistable force of nature inexplicable.

There are really only two aspects of Fruits of the Earth that mark it as a true prairie novel. The first is Abe's huge brick mansion, which he builds with the proceeds of his 1912 harvest. Like the Banff Springs Hotel, its chief value lies in its incongruity. It stands as a symbol of Abe's innate nihilism and rebelliousness against nature--as a symbol of Abe's determination to impose something of himself, preserve his identity on the alien plain. True, when Abe takes an evening ride towards town, and he turns to see how his estate looks with all the lights turned on, he discovers that the house "did not loom high but seemed rather to form a dent in the sky-line." But for Abe, "That was the proudest moment of his life; and he raised an arm as though reaching for the stars" (118-119). The second true prairie aspect is, of course, "The Prairie" chapter, for here is where Grove first shows the essential harmony of spirit between God-created land and man. I think it is the zenith of the work. Although Grove doesn't make effective use of what he achieves in the chapter, he introduces it very effectively by invoking what seems to be a common thematic feature of fiction of the Canadian West: the presentation of the death of a child as a sacrifice which yields fuller understanding of the new settlers' relationship with their new homeland. Thus, in Laura Goodman Salverson's The Viking Heart, the death of young Thor, in World War I, is a devastating shock to his parents, Borga and

Bjorn. During a memorial service in the community church, the minister says, "How can we hope to comfort these aged parents who have sacrificed so much . . . To live usefully and to die nobly--this is not death but victory . . . Your son who is dead yet liveth. He lives on in the life of our country." Later on, at home, Borga thinks that Canada has demanded much of them; but she remembers the minister's words, and she whispers to herself, "In the life of my country."[17] And in Kiriak's Sons of the Soil, Wakar's young son dies of fever, and the narrator says: "Thus it came about that little Semen found a grave in the virgin plain, a resting-place marked by a large cross set firmly in alien soil, no longer alien by reason of his death. And the ancient symbol, which was like a challenge to the empty land, seemed to say that this child and those of his blood were now dedicated to the task of transforming the wilderness into a Christian civilization." Later, when Hrehory Workun, the general spokesman for the new settlers, returns from working at odd jobs in the city, he sees the new grave and says, "Well, friends, Canada now for a certainty is becoming our eternal motherland."[18] In Fruits of the Earth, it is the death of Charlie that causes Abe to finally take time to think of fundamentals. When he begins to ponder whether life has any meaning, in true prairie fashion, he goes out alone into the empty plains, and he evolves a conception of the meaning of life from his perception of the facts of the land.

Like the tonal quality of the excerpt from Over Prairie Trails, the tonal quality of "The Prairie" chapter is cumulative. But I cannot quote the whole of it, and so I summarize much, and highlight only a few passages. When he stands alone on the empty plans, Abe looks about and seems to see for the first time. He becomes aware of the permanence of the prairie, even as it undergoes the slow process of cosmic change. Reaching to apprehend the concept of mutability, his mind seems "to hover over the landscape as in flight" (135). Surrounded by utter monotony, he has entered into that neutral territory of romance, where commonplace objects, such as farm buildings, lose their concreteness and become things of intellect--mirages:

> Often a distant strip of land was lifted above the horizon like a low-flung cloud; a town or a group of farmsteads, ordinarily hidden behind the intervening shoulder of the world, stood up clearly against the whitish sky which only overhead shaded off into a pale blue. The strip of featureless air between the mirage and the solid earth below was of that silvery, polished whiteness which we see otherwise only in the distant mirror of a smooth sheet of water. (135)

The optical illusion that mirage involves enhances the sense of the illusoriness of all man-made things as they hover momentarily above the surface of the earth. As Abe continues his imaginary flight, the narrator gives a detailed, bird's-eye view of the flora and fauna of the prairie landscape--a landscape in which "man remains distinctly an interloper" (137). Then he describes the effect the land has on the character of those who choose to live on it:

> If they have lived here for some time, a decade or longer, and stayed on in the face of all the inevitable and unforeseen discouragements and difficulties, so that the landscape has had time to enforce in them a reaction to its own character, they seem slow, deliberate, earthbound. In their features lingers something wistful; in their speech, something hesitating, groping, almost deprecatory and apologetic; in their silences, something eloquent. (137)

This last is Grove's evocation of the essence of general prairie human nature. "Earthbound" does not mean experientially time-bound, for the landscape has the effect of imaginatively raising the prairie man above time. "It is a landscape in which, to him who surrenders himself, the sense of one's life as a whole seems always present, birth and death being mere scansions in the flow of a somewhat debilitated stream of vitality" (137). And the narrator goes on to say, "Perhaps the time best fitted to bring out the characteristic impression of the landscape is neither moon nor midnight, but the first grey dawn of day, especially a dull day; or the first dim dusk of night, that dusk in which horizons become blurred and the height of human buildings seems diminished" (138). In other words, the characteristic impression is best evoked in a shadowy romance setting. Insofar as he is purportedly conscious of the unique, mysterious quality of the landscape, Abe might be said to have surrendered himself to it. But his sojourn in neutral romance territory seems pointless. He articulates none of the great commonplaces he has learned to his people. Instead, "headstrong as ever" (139), he re-immures himself in the affairs of the district, and these affairs draw the focus of his thoughts for the remainder of the work. With one exception. In the fourth-to-last "Haying" chapter, Abe once more becomes the medium of romance vision. In this instance, the routine, ritualistic activity of haying attains a neutral, static quality that enables Abe's imagination to take flight--"His mind hovered over his life as the marsh-hawk hovers over the prairie lifted to the sky" (231). The chapter is a brief tableau, in which, despite the amount of concentrated activity, there is a wonderful quality of stillness. The special, illusional, shadowy atmosphere is enhanced at even-tide by the mist: ". . . radiation is swift on flat, unrelieved ground; and, with the gathering dusk, the moisture held by the air began to condense into a thick white mist. Already horses and men were wading about in this mist which, so far, lay knee-high. This gave a peculiar detached air to the scene: the day was done; the time to rest was at hand; and a great, overwhelming lassitude came over the workers" (234). Out of the mistiness, out of the imaginative hovering, Abe finally seems to have learned something. He "could not remember the time when he had worked in such utter peace. Last night resignation had come to him. In no other way could he find happiness: a life in the present, looking neither backward nor forward" (241). Now it seems to me that this marks the point of a most appropriate prairie compromise. But, in retrospect, the romance vision which reveals the possibility of compromise in the "Haying" chapter is falsified and perverted. It turns out that Grove has created that wonderfully calm tableau for the purpose of achieving maximum contrast as he sets the stage for the turbulent melodrama surrounding Frances' disgrace. And Abe repudiates his resignation by self-deprecatingly regarding it as a shameful denial of his duty to the district.

During one of the social hours at "Nicoll's Corner," the men of Spalding District speculate about how a man can walk faster than a moving train, for one of them has seen a fellow striding along on the top of moving box-cars, and jumping with ease from one car to another, even though the motion of the train must be more rapid than the motion of the man. Old Mr. Blaine tries to explain: "The motion of the car puts something into the man that carries him over: and they call it inertia" (84). I think Abe is analogous to the man on the moving train. For, if "The Prairie" chapter, with its brief echoing in the "Haying" chapter, is the zenith of Fruits of the Earth, it is also the hiatus. The motion of the district puts into Abe the inertia that carries him across. My over-all judgement of his function in the work is neatly summed up in the men's reaction to Mr. Blaine's explanation: "There was a silence as if at an anticlimax. Nobody cared to contradict; but nobody was quite convinced."

Any attempt to explain why the Saskatchewan man differs to a noticeable degree in personality and outlook from the Albertan or Manitoban who should logically be his counterpart must take into account the consequences, both physical and psychological, of the dust-bowl years. The world-wide economic depression that begin in 1929 affected all of Canada; Saskatchewan bore an additional and dreadful burden--nine successive years of drought and crop failure. . . . For the people of Saskatchewan that nine years' sojourn in a dust-darkened wilderness was a genuinely traumatic experience which has left its mark not only on those who actually lived through the Dirty Thirties but to some degree on their descendants.

—*Saskatchewan*

Men who, lapped in an enervating cloak of eastern smog rendered soft and pliable by the eternal West Coast rain, would pass through life in meek unquestioning obedience to those placed in authority over them, develop, after a brief spell of prairie living, affinities with the Mau Mau or the I.R.A. Scorched by sun and battered by wind three months of the year and confined in a deep freeze for six, the prairie dweller is soon afflicted by a kind of nervous irritability which impels him to flail out in all directions. Being, as a rule, a religious man--intimate association with nature at its most awesome makes him so--he hesitates to blame the Almighty for his miseries. The next authority--human, fallible, vulnerable--is the government. And something, by God, has got to be done about it!

--*Saskatchewan*

TENSION WITH POISE: LYRICAL STASIS IN ROSS;
THE UNBROKEN CIRCUIT IN KROETSCH

I

> . . . I have given you a land for which ye did not labor, and cities which you built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and olive yards which ye planted not do ye eat.
>
> Now, therefore, fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord.
>
> And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
>
> --Joshua 24: 13-15

The Book of Joshua is the first of the twelve historical books of the Old Testament. Joshua is one of the twelve spies who has originally scouted the Land of Canaan. After his appointment as successor to Moses, Joshua leads the military campaigns to conquer the promised land, and, just prior to his death, gives instructions for the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel, and warns his people that "If ye forsake the lord, and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you." The people promise to serve and obey the Lord, and Joshua takes a great stone, and proclaims that it shall be the symbol of their covenant. "Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spoke unto us: it shall be a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God." I think it is Ross's intention to have the Old Testament context of his title resonating quietly but perceptibly throughout As For Me and My House. Perhaps some of my reasons for thinking so are tenuous. For example, I find that the work contains a remarkable number of twelves. And I regard "pebbles" as a notable word, particularly when its context associates it with two significant, white stones. But there are more important reasons. For one, the atmosphere throughout the work is pervaded by a sense of tension which, in turn, derives from a sense of threat--the kind of threat that is implied in Joshua's warning to the people of Israel. For another, among the main themes of the work is an important religious theme. In the same way that an implied imperative resonates throughout the developing action of Fruits of the Earth, an implied interrogative--what is the nature of God?--resonates throughout As For Me and My House. This is not to say that the work explores no other leading ideas. I mean, simply, that, in one of its several aspects, the work presents a serious study of the ways in which prairie man comes to know the nature of God, and the ways in which he sees his relationship with God. Given the prairie setting; given the time-span of the work, approximately one year in the dust-bowl era, when God did indeed seem intent to consume the prairie earth with deadly, dry heat; and given the Old Testament context of the title, the answer to the implied interrogative might simply be: God is Power and Law; He is to be feared and to be obeyed. But flatly to make such an assertion is to make the Old Testament context over-loud. The Old Testament view is fundamental; it is the ground-bass of the work. But other views are counterpointed above it, so that there is no single, definitive answer to the speculative question.

I use the term "counterpointed," a musical term, because it seems to me that the composition of As For Me and My House is analogous to the composition of a piece of impressionistic music. The work is written in the impressionistic, lyrical mode. Rather than narratively presenting an unfolding plot--which Ralph Freedman defines, simply, as "the display of interaction between man and world in time"[1]--the author exploits elements of plot in order to create a sequential series of "impressions"--a series of somewhat symmetrical patterns of imagery. Instead of the sense of straightforward narrative movement towards plot resolution, the complex image patterns create a sense of weakened directional motion. The movement from image pattern to image pattern is qualitative rather than quantitative, for each new structure of imagery is simply a rearrangement of the elements present in its predecessor; or, each new structure presents a minor development of fragments of images found in previous structures. Perhaps what I mean will be more clear from the following. Let us suppose, for example, that the weather is a significant plot element in As For Me and My House, as it is in The Words of my Roaring. It is logical to assume that, since dusty and windy days are unnerving, a rain shower, or some kind of break in the weather, should ease the tension. But this is not the case in As For Me and My House. Through his first-person narrator, Mrs. Bentley, the author exploits changes in the weather in order to emphasize the fact that the tension is not eased. The only change is in the imagery with which the tension is evoked. Thus, on Sunday Evening, April 30, Mrs. Bentley writes: "It's the most nerve-racking wind I've ever listened to. Sometimes it sinks a little, as if spent and out of breath, then comes high and importunate again. Sometimes it's wind, sometimes frightened hands that shake doors and windows. Sometimes it makes the little room and its smug, familiar furniture a dramatic inconsistency, sometimes a relief."[2] In this instance, the wind is personified, and the house is alternately an absurd object of its violent attention, and a shelter from its threat. On Tuesday

Evening, June 6, Mrs. Bentley writes:

> The wind keeps on. When you step outside its strong hot push is like something solid pressed against your face. The sun through the dust looks big and red and close. Bigger, redder, closer every day. You begin to glance at it with a doomed feeling that there's no escape. . . . The wind and sawing eaves and the rattle of windows have made the house a cell. Sometimes it's as if we had taken shelter here, sometimes as if we were at the bottom of a deep moaning lake. We are quiet and tense and wary. Our muscles and lungs seem pitted to keep the walls from caving in. (74)

In this instance, the hot, dry wind is ultimately described in terms of a totally different element, water, and the house now becomes a submerged cell. But the tension is the same. By July, the wind has blown itself out. But now there's the heat: "There's the same tension in the heat tonight. It's been gathering and tightening now for weeks, and this has been the hottest, stillest day of all. It's like watching an inflated, ever-distending balloon, waiting with baited breath for it to burst. Even the thud of moth wings on the lamp--through the dense, clotted heat tonight it's like a drum" (114). We surely have the feeling that, if only the balloon would burst, the tightness in the atmosphere would be relaxed. But, when the rain finally comes, it assails the house in the same way that the dry wind, in the first excerpt I have quoted, has assailed the house: "The rain's so sharp and strong it crackles on the windows just like sand. There's a howl in the wind, and as it tugs at the house and rushes past we seem perched up again all alone somewhere on an isolated peak" (125). In this instance, the tension is implied in the image of precariousness Mrs. Bentley has evoked. I might go on citing examples. But my point is simply that, in the space of approximately eighty pages, there has been no quantitative change or development in the pervading atmosphere of the work. We have been shown a series of impressions, each of which is fundamentally the same because each uses imagery to evoke the ever-present sense of tension or precariousness. It is the change in the imagery that generates qualitative movement. And sometimes the imagery reaches the kind of a climax of intensity. Thus, in the following, the feeling of precariousness is most intense, for the imagery reduces the solid earth itself to a single strip of road laid across a void:

> The rain had only started and was just a drizzle still, but you could feel that it was settling down to make a night of it. No one else was out. I stopped and looked up Main Street once, the little false fronts pale and blank and ghostly in the corner light, the night encircling it so dense and wet that the hard gray wheel-packed earth, beginning now to glisten with the rain, was like a single ply of solid matter laid across a chasm. I hesitated a moment and went on dubiously, almost believing that where we reached the darkness we would topple off. (131)

I have confined my illustrations here to "weather" examples. But, through Mrs. Bentley, the author creates the same kinds of sequential, symmetrical impressions of other aspects of the work. So, we haven't the sense of a narrator—like the narrator in Fruits of the Earth telling the story of Abe Spalding and the Spalding District--telling the story of the Bentleys and Horizon. We haven't the sense of a plot unfolding as the story unwinds. Instead, we have the sense that we are being shown a series of pictures, in which narrative movement and elements of plot have been absorbed and refashioned into patterns of imagery.

What I have called qualitative movement, Ralph Freedman calls lyrical movement. Freedman draws the distinction between narrative movement and lyrical movement this way:

> . . . narrative is the surge towards that which does not yet exist. In lyrical poetry, by contrast, events are contained in one another. Consecutiveness is simulated by lyrical language: its surge toward greater intensity reveals not new events but the significance of existing events. Actions are

> turned into scenes which embody recognitions. . . . In conventional narratives the outer world is the thing. It is placed beyond both writer and reader, interposing between them and the theme. In the lyrical mode, such a world is conceived, not as a universe in which men display their actions, but as a poet's vision fashioned as a design. The world is reduced to a lyrical point of view, the equivalent of the poet's 'I': the lyrical self.[3]

In As For Me and My House, the lyrical point of view is Mrs. Bentley's. Of course, she functions according to the will of the concealed author. But, in herself, she is the compleat prairie romancer. Our perception of her world is guided by her recorded response to her world, and that response is consistently imaginative, subjective, and self-reflexive. The work is presented in the form of a personal diary, or journal. It is not a daily, but a somewhat sporadic record of Mrs. Bentley's observations regarding the occurrences and experiences in her life as wife of a small-town Protestant preacher. Now frequently the journal form can be used as a mode of stringent verisimilitude. Daniel Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year, for example, achieves verisimilitude so successfully that it has been taken as factual record and not as fiction.[4] But Mrs. Bentley isn't trying for verisimilitude. The way she records what she sees in her world can be inferred from the following: "According to Philip it's form that's important in a picture, not the subject or the associations the subject calls to mind; the pattern you see, not the literary emotion you feel; and it follows, therefore, that my enthusiasm doesn't mean much from an artist's point of view. A picture worth its salt is supposed to make you experience something that he calls aesthetic excitement, not send you into dithyrambs about humanity in microcosm" (80). In other words, Mrs. Bentley is concerned to record, accurately, not so much what she sees as the way she feels about what she sees. Her response to her world is emotional and "enthusiastic." And I think that her enthusiasm here bespeaks vitality of imagination. Paul Kirby, the ranch-boy-cum-teacher with a penchant for philology, remarks once that "enthusiasm" means "the god within" (105). His remark is reminiscent of Coleridge's definition of the primary imagination, "the living Power and prime agent of all human Perception, and . . . a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[5] I think that Ross intends Mrs. Bentley's imagination to be her "prime agent" of perception. Everything she sees acquires an imaginative vitality by, in Grove's terms, an infusion of herself. Her intellect--and by intellect here I mean a total complex of rational, emotional, and imaginative faculties--encompasses the microcosm, the house and the small-town environment, and merges with it. Her intellect encompasses the macrocosm, the prairie landscape as mask of God, and merges with it. Through her lyrical point of view, we see the distinctions between one character and another begin to blur; and we see the distinction between character and environment begin to blur. Again and again in the pages of her journal, she gives us the kind of lesson in perception Nathaniel Hawthorne gives in "The Custom-House" chapter of _The Scarlet Letter_. Through her romance perspective, we see familiar, ordinary settings, such as the parlour of the manse, dissolved into things of intellect and transformed by the special colouring her imagination projects. Thus, she continually evokes the remote world of romance--the world where actual and imaginary may meet and each, not only imbue itself with the nature of the other, but become indistinguishable from the other. One example should illustrate what I mean by her imaginative, romance perspective. Mrs. Bentley is sitting alone in the parlour, her "eyes fixed staring on the lamp," her thought focused on the notion that Philip and

Judith have arranged a rendezvous: "There was a listening, pressing emptiness through the house. It began to hover round me, to dim the room, at last to merge with the yellow flame like a haze. And then on the smooth expanse of it as on a screen my dread began to live and shape itself. I saw them meet. I saw her white face. Over and over" (137). Here, the reality of the parlour setting is dissolved into pure, shadowy atmosphere, and that which is intangible--dread--is all that exists with formal outlines. Even when, moments later, she slips furtively outside, she exploits the reality of the night for her imaginative purpose: ". . . the night was darker than ever, like a slate, and again my dread began to write and shape itself" (138).

Because Mrs. Bentley's romance vision blurs the distinction between tangible and intangible, animate and inanimate spheres, all the themes of the work are, in Freedman's words, contained in one another. I shall not attempt to isolate each of the major themes and trace the way they are counterpointed throughout the work. My intention is to focus on the way in which Mrs. Bentley imaginatively conceives of the nature of God, and the nature of the relationship between prairie man and his God. I do not choose this aspect of the work to focus on simply because it is the most profound aspect of As For Me and My House. I choose it because I think Ross is the first writer of prairie fiction to evoke full realization of the fact that, on the prairie, earth and sky assume a detachment and an immensity that compel an awareness of worlds not realized in the light of common day. He has endowed Mrs. Bentley with keen percipience. He has given her the kind of imagination that enables her to at least make the attempt to comprehend the concept of infinity--as McCourt has said, driving on the prairie, one feels as if he is driving straight into infinity. I mean to show how Mrs. Bentley's mind works as she attempts the approach to infinity, and how she perceives of humanity in the face of infinity. Taken as a whole, her romance vision of the nature of God is a complex of several different views, so that the final answer to the speculative question is an ambiguous one. But I think the ambiguity is appropriate. We can't know, for certain, what the final answer is. Ambiguousness simply points up the limits of human knowledge. And besides, it is necessary for the romancer to maintain a degree of obscurity in his--in this case, her--vision, so that its illusional quality not be shattered by the flat slap of a realistic, definitive, platitudinal reply. There is less ambiguity in Mrs. Bentley's view of humanity, although that view has a kind of fluctuating rhythm. Generally, her world view seems to be impressionistic, in the philosophical sense with which art critics use the term. But Mrs. Bentley's impressionism is somewhat different from what an art critic might describe as typical impressionism. I think it is through Mrs. Bentley's impressionism that Ross evokes his own version of the prairie paradox. Unlike McCourt, he does not see man as both a creature of utter insignificance in the sum of things and the very centre of the universe. Rather, he sees mutable things in a position of stasis that somehow suggests a sense of transience. Set against the abiding earth, the passing parade of mortal things--what might be called the mode of mutability--is cyclically eternal, and therefore, in a sense, immutable. Perhaps the most illuminating example of mutability in permanent stasis I can suggest is Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Certainly, I cannot explain it in Ross without giving illustrations from the text. So, before I concentrate on Mrs. Bentley and the speculative question, in the following paragraph I offer a typical critic's definition of impressionism, and then several comparative samplings of Mrs. Bentley's impressionism, which generally allows for a sense of stasis in conjunction with a sense of transience. I realize that I am placing a rather heavy emphasis on stasis. But the romancer cannot evoke a vision of intangible realms without first evoking an ambient stillness. Whether or not Ross would accept the term "romancer" with regard to Mrs. Bentley, I mean to show that he is careful to permit her the ambient stillness.

In his fourth volume of The Social History of Art, Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age, Arnold Hauser explains impressionism this way:

> Impressionism . . . describes the changeability, the nervous rhythm, the sudden, sharp but always ephemeral impressions of life. . . . It implies an enormous expansion of sensual perception, a new sharpening of sensibility, a new irritability. . . . The dominion of the moment over permanence and continuity, the feeling that every phenomenon is a fleeting and never-to-be-repeated constellation, a wave gliding away on the river of time, the river into which 'one cannot step twice,' is the simplest formula to which impressionism can be reduced. The whole method of impressionism, with all its artistic expedients and tricks, is bent, above all, on giving expression to this Heraclitean outlook and on stressing that reality is not a being but a becoming, not a condition but a process. Every impressionistic picture is the deposit of a moment in the perpetuum mobile of existence, the representation of a precarious, unstable balance in the play of contending forces. The impressionistic vision transforms nature into a process of growth and decay. Everything stable and coherent is dissolved into metamorphoses and assumes the character of the unfinished and the fragmentary.[6]

Mrs. Bentley's impressions of life are noticeably sharp and sensual, as, for example, her brief descriptions of the minor figures in the work show. One of the minor figures, the self-appointed social leader of Horizon, Mrs. Finley, is

> an alert, thin-voiced, thin-featured little woman, up to her eyes in the task of managing the town and making it over in her own image. . . . There's a crusading steel in her eye to warn she brooks no half-way measures. The deportment and mien of her own family bear witness to a potter's hand that never falters. Her

> husband, for instance, is an appropriately meek little man, but you can't help feeling what an achievement is his meekness. It's like a tight wire cage drawn over him, and words and gestures, indicative of a more expansive past, keep squeezing through it the same way that parts of portly Mrs. Wenderby this afternoon kept squeezing through the back and sides of Philip's study armchair. (5-6)

There is a synaesthetic quality--that is, one sensation evoked in terms of another--and a proprioceptive quality--that is, an eliciting of a kinesthetic response on the reader's part--in this passage, as in most of Mrs. Bentley's imagery. But there is less changeability in Mrs. Bentley's impressionism that in Hauser's version. Not that she is without the sense that phenomena are ephemeral. But she sees ephemeral imprints as continuously recurring in essentially the same form. Or, she sees them as somehow frozen into immobility. For example, in one of the most emphatically self-reflexive excerpts of the work, she walks down Main Street and feels as if the whole town is a mirror.

> Or better, like a whole set of mirrors. Ranged round me so that at every step I met the preacher's wife, splayfooted rubbers, dowdy coat and all. I couldn't escape. The gates and doors and windows kept reminding me.
>
> Hurrying along I had a curious sense of leaving imprints of myself. I crossed the town, took the road that runs beneath the five grain elevators, left it for drier walking on the railroad track--but all the way back to the parsonage, no matter how fast or how far I walked, the imprints were still there. (23)

She sees life as a constant flow along the river of time, and she senses the innate vitality of all living things as they are carried along with the river. But she sees life-energy as a fluctuating force. Sometimes it is presented as if in slow motion, or stop-motion--as if the Heraclitean river of time were momentarily frozen. Thus, she describes Judith: ". . . behind the white face and timid eyes there's something fearless, a press of strong, untried womanhood. It's just like the day Philip and I sat in the snowstorm watching the water rush through the stones--so swift that sometimes, as we watched it, it seemed still, solid like glass" (91). Most frequently, she uses insect imagery to evoke the sense of transience, the vulnerability, the insignificance of living things. And, again, there is a sense of, in Grove's terms, a somewhat debilitated stream of vitality. Thus, she and Paul, sitting on the level prairie, are "like a pair of flies on an upturned mixing bowl" (95). And, on one hot day in August: "The heat was heavy and suffocating. We seemed imbedded in it, like insects in a fluid that has congealed" (117). And, after she discovers Philip's infidelity, she evokes her own sense of helplessness and vulnerability by likening the ache inside her to "a live fly struggling in a block of ice" (123). What she has in common with Hauser's version of impressionism is a sense of the precarious position of all mutable things. Thus, the same rush of water that she has used to evoke Judith's vitality becomes a force that carries a conjectural type of humanity--a snow-drift that looks like a sailboat--to destruction: "From the railway bridge we watched the water rushing at the bottom in a frothy yellow flood. Not far upstream an overhanging drift dropped in, shot off with the current crest upwards like a sailboat, then stunned itself to pieces on the trestle of the bridge" (159). But, in her view, precariousness, or the tension that derives from a sense of precariousness, itself becomes a relatively stable quality, and she frequently uses Philip's drawings as an index of the constancy of tension. Thus, on one of her walks through the dust-darkened town, she thinks: "It was like one of Philip's drawings. There was the same tension, the same vivid immobility, and behind it all somewhere the same sense of transience" (59). This last, in essence, is

Ross's prairie paradox. I might add that I am not interested in proving whether or not Philip truly is an artist. To me, what Mrs. Bentley *sees* in Philip's drawings is more significant that what might really be presented in them. Her description of another of them should complete the comparison between her version of impressionism and Hauser's:

> Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle.
>
> But the town in contrast has an upstart, mean complacency. The false fronts haven't seen the prairie. Instead they stare at each other across the street as into mirrors of themselves, absorbed in their own reflections.
>
> The town shouldn't be there. It stands up so insolent and smug and self-assertive that your fingers itch to smudge it out and let the underlying rhythms complete themselves. (69)

As Grove has said, on the prairie, man is distinctly an interloper. In this last, the cyclically eternal mode of mutability is represented by the broken-down old horse. The town is condemned to dissolution and decay. And I think it's pretty clear that one very appropriate place for Mrs. Bentley to engage the speculative question is the prairie's edge, "where the town breaks off."

Since Mrs. Bentley's imagination has the widest latitude, the greatest freedom of action of all the quantities contained in the work, it is necessary that, in complementary fashion, other elements of the work move within fairly narrow restrictions. The plot is narrow, in the sense of uncomplicated. Probably the single most important event in the plot is Philip's adultery with Judith. For the most part, the Bentleys' routine, in purely physical terms, is rigidly limited. We see Philip most frequently on his way to his study, where he closets himself. We see Mrs. Bentley walking along Main Street to stand in the shelter of the last of five grain elevators; or, we see her walking along the railroad track to the edge of a deep ravine, which becomes a kind of symbol for the edge of the tangible world. The Bentleys leave the community together only once, to take a short holiday on Paul's brother's ranch. So, with narrative action at a minimum, the routine of the Bentleys' life attains that static quality which is a necessary prerequisite if the romancer is to engender a vision of a remote, neutral territory in which the actual and the imaginary may merge. In a sense, stasis equals stagnancy in As For Me and My House. Horizon with its Main Street is a repetition of the towns Philip has previously preached in, and the present relationship between the Bentleys is essentially the same in Horizon as it has been in other towns. As Mrs. Bentley says, "Twelve years with him now, quiet, eventless years, each one like the one before it, and still what is between us is precarious" (10). In her view, one day in the life of the Bentleys is the type of all the days they have spent together:

> The days repeat themselves without progressing. Sometimes it seems only one morning that I've stood at the door a moment watching the smoke from Horizon's chimneys mount through the frosty air in compact blue and silver plumes. It's only one noon that we've sat down to the table and swallowed a few tasteless morsels in silence--one interminable noon--and one cold, pallid twilight, waiting to light the lamp, that I've watched the night deepen, and the walls melt into the darkness. There have been mornings when the smoke was lost in a blizzard, and days when I lit the lamp early, but the oneness still prevails. (150)

But Mrs. Bentley's untrammelled imagination imbues stasis on a personal level with cosmic import. Here is her lyrical view during a walk on a hot, dusty, windy day in May:

> All round the dust hung dark and heavy, the distance thickening it so that a mile or more away it made a blur of earth and sky; but overhead it was thin still, like a film of fog or smoke, and the light came through it filtered, mild and tawny.
>
> It was as if there were a lantern hung above you in a darkened and enormous room; or as if the day had turned out all its other lights, waiting for the actors to appear, and you by accident had found your way into the spotlight, like a little ant or beetle on the stage.
>
> I turned once and looked back at Horizon, the huddled little clutter of houses and stores, the five grain elevators, aloof and imperturbable, like ancient obelisks, and behind the dust clouds, lapping at the sky. . . . The dust clouds behind the town kept darkening and thinning and swaying, a furtive tirelessness about the way they wavered and merged with one another that reminded me of northern lights in winter. It was like a quivering backdrop, before which was to be enacted some grim, primeval tragedy. The little town cowered close to the earth as if to hide itself. The elevators stood up passive, stoical. All round me ran a hurrying whisper through the grass. (59)

The blur of earth and sky, the strange, filtered quality of the light--these suggest the neutral and remote territory of romance. And note how carefully Mrs. Bentley sets the stage. The tone of the excerpt is meticulously controlled: throughout, there is an oppressive sense of threat, and, somehow the feeling that what is about to be enacted is some awful sacrificial ritual. Indirectly, by insect imagery, she shows how insignificant is humanity on the face of the dust-darkened prairie. This momentary recognition is followed by an indirect suggestion of one way of conceiving of the nature of the prairie God. The elevators are "like ancient obelisks"--symbols of a pre-Judean deity. There are five of them, and the number is probably significant because, as a symbol, five, since ancient times, is typically regarded as an imitation of the First Cause. For five is seen as incorruptible by virtue of its recurrence in multiplication; five always returns to itself: 5 x 5 = 25 x 5 = 125 . . .[7] In this instance, in counterpoint to the Old Testament view of God, the

First Cause, characterized by its symbols, is "aloof and imperturbable." In the face of this passive aloofness, humanity is in fearful subjection, totally vulnerable--but not always utterly resigned. The very next day, Mrs. Bentley takes another walk: "When finally I came out the dust had thickened so that I could see just the first two elevators. The next two were dim and blurred, as if the first ones had moved and left their imprints behind. I stood a while straining my eyes to make the fifth one out, with an odd kind of satisfaction that I couldn't" (62). It is as if, with the realization that symbols of the deity are, after all, man-made symbols, and that they, too, are part of the slow-motion passing parade, some of the sense of threat has been effaced.

There is a strong suggestion that, as in Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind, the wind in As For Me and My House is a symbol of Godhood. On the last Sunday of April, the wind is blowing steadily, as it has for a week. Philip's services in both Partridge Hill and Horizon are difficult because the congregation is listening to the wind, not to Philip's sermon. The "only one who seemed indifferent to the wind" (37) is Joe Lawson. Now Lawson is almost always referred to as "the man who reminds me of Philip" or "the man who looks like Philip," so it seems likely that Mrs. Bentley sees in him an echoing of Philip's rather ambivalent view of God. Mrs. Bentley has indirectly suggested the ironic discrepancy in Philip's theological stance when she has described "the text that he always uses for his first Sunday, As For Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord. It's a stalwart, four-square, Christian sermon. It nails his colours to the mast. It declares to the town his creed, lets them know what they may expect. The Word of God as revealed in Holy Writ--Christ Crucified--salvation through His Grace--those are the things that Philip stands for" (4). As Mrs. Bentley describes it, then, Philip's "first Sunday" sermon is an inversion of the Old Testament text. For there is nothing in the Book of Joshua about Christ and salvation through Grace. Shortly thereafter, we learn that, at least as Mrs. Bentley sees it, Philip doesn't believe a word of what he is preaching, and the hypocrisy of it all is eroding his manhood. Again, I am not interested in proving whether or not Philip is conscience-stricken over his hypocrisy. What's important is that Mrs. Bentley, in a sense, exploits her view of Philip's hypocrisy in order to build her abstract conceptions. In any event, Philip's supposed unbelief is underlined by Mrs. Bird, who says Philip reminds her of the Doctor--"Cold, scientific" (22). And Mrs. Bentley says,

> . . . there's the strange part--he tries to be so sane and rational yet all the time he keeps on believing that there's a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him. He's cold and skeptical towards religion. He tries to measure life with intellect and reason; insists to himself that he is satisfied with what they prove for him; yet there persists this conviction of a supreme being interested in him, opposed to him, arranging with tireless concern the details of his life to make certain it will be spent in a wind-swept, sunburned little Horizon. (17)

Philip, then, is something of an Old Testament man after all. Like Joe Lawson, he is a "son of the Law." The force of the opposing will pitted against the both of them is felt in the wind. Their seeming indifference to it is their approximation of a Job-like attitude of resigned endurance. Within a week of the last Sunday in April, Mrs. Bentley has resigned herself to recognizing the wind as master: "A while ago the wind and the crunch of sand on the floor used to put an itch in my fingers. I wanted to tear and shake and crush something. But it's different now. I sit quiet, listening, looking at the fuchsia till it's disappeared. In the last week I seem to have realized that wind is master" (74). That fuchsia, incidentally, has been regarded by Mrs. Bentley as about all she has left to help her maintain her own integrity. The point is that, with her apprehension of the fact that wind is master, she sees herself as a mere nothing. And she speaks for the humanity of the town when she describes Philip's drawing, that same night: ". . . the town is seen from a distance, a lost little cluster on the long sweep of prairie. High above it dust clouds wheel and wrestle heedlessly. Here, too, wind is master" (74). But, again, the force of human vitality is a rhythmically fluctuating force. If humanity is virtually nothing under the will of the master, it is at least persistent, as Mrs. Bentley's response--reinforced by her implication of Paul's response--to another of Philip's drawings shows. It is

> a sketch of a little schoolhouse, just like Partridge Hill. There's a stable at the back, and some buggies in the yard. It stands up lonely and defiant on a landscape like a desert. Almost a lunar desert, with queer, fantastic pits and drifts of sand encroaching right to the doorstep. You see it the way Paul sees it. The distorted, barren landscape makes you feel the meaning of its persistence there. As Paul put it last Sunday when we drove up, it's Humanity in microcosm. Faith, ideals, reason--all the things that really are humanity--like Paul you feel them there, their stand against the implacable blunderings of Nature--and suddenly like Paul you begin to think poetry, and strive to utter eloquence. (80)

Here again is another counterpointed inversion. Instead of pathetically succumbing to masterly, alien Nature, humanity stands against it, and represents qualities that are more stable and coherent, more noble than the accidental qualities Nature evinces. Since "Nature" is capitalized, I think Mrs. Bentley has Nature as mask of God in mind. And so her view of God, in this instance, is the view of John Stuart Mill: God is omniscient but not all-powerful. He needs man's help if the world is to function with stability and coherence.[8]

Mrs. Bentley has said that Philip is half-convinced that the supreme being is interested in him. The aloof, imperturbable obelisk-elevators have suggested a disinterested supreme being. The changing view of the deity's conjectured attitude towards prairie man becomes a kind of "theme with variations" throughout As For Me and My House. Thus, during a Sunday evening service in June, while Philip prays for rain, Mrs. Bentley looks out "to the still expanse of prairie, the deadly sun glare of it" (83), and she wishes Philip's words would, for once, at least carry a little comfort. She spends a few moments on the church steps with one of the poverty-beaten farmers' wives, who says, "We have a service for rain about this time every year." And Mrs. Bentley thinks again of the deadly sun glare of the prairie: ". . . tonight again the sun went down through a clear, brassy sky. Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of its deity cannot weaken--a very great faith, or a very foolish one" (84). Actually, the "indifference" here bespeaks a malicious interest on the part of the supreme being. As for the great, foolish faith of the people, I am reminded of McCourt's description of the prairie dweller: "Being, as a rule, a religious man--intimate association with nature at its most awesome inclines to make him so--he hesitates to blame the Almighty for his miseries."[9] The implication is that the prairie dweller's conscientiousness in following the routine ritual that is customary to his local church is a kind of self-defensive superstition. Now superstition is irrational, and therefore, perhaps, foolish. But, since the only way prairie man can make himself outstanding on the empty plain is by absurd or incongruous behaviour, it seems somehow appropriate that the prairie dwellers of As For Me and My House are greatly foolish in their faith. The best example of prairie absurdity in the work is Mrs.

Bird. And I think her modification of "Rock of Ages"--

> Let us labor not in vain,
> Hear us Father, send us rain.

--is a magnificent, if tragi-comic, little gesture of prairie absurdity. The fool, the jester-figure is so often tragi-comic; so often made to feel an outcast; so often made to feel that his whole existence is precariously poised on the whims of his superiors. Consider Shakespeare's Festus, for example. I think that the sense of prairie man's subjection to the caprices of the prairie gods is effectively evoked when, during the holiday trip away from Horizon, Mrs. Bentley tries to take a philosopher's look at "a booming little town that started up just a year ago" (96)--a Horizon-in-the-making. She says: "They're sad little towns when a philosopher looks at them. Brave little mushroom heyday--new town, new world--false fronts and future, the way all Main Streets grow--and then prolonged senility" (96). Paul calls them "grasshopper towns."

> For there's a story that a goddess once, enamored of a mortal, sought for him from the other gods the gift of immortality. But not of youth. The years went on, and her handsome lover grew bald and bleary-eyed. Young and beautiful herself she begged the gods again either to grant him youth or let him die like other men, but this time they were obdurate. And she hardened at last, and found another lover, and to escape the first one changed him into a grasshopper.
>
> They're poor, tumbledown, shabby little towns, but they persist. Even the dry years yield a little wheat; even the little means livelihood for some. I know a town where once it rained all June, and that fall the grain lay in piles outside full granaries. It's an old town now, shabby and decrepit like the others, but it, too, persists. It knows only two years: the year it rained all June, and next year. (97)

The mythic, metaphorical key, the archetypal picture of a prairie town--these, again, are evidence of Mrs. Bentley's romance, or, in her own word, "philosopher" vision. The legendary story alluded to here is the story of Tithonus. As Tennyson's Tithonus says, in his dramatic monologue, "The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts."[10] But it seems a cruel jest of the prairie gods to tease their subjects with a one-summer's gift of rain, and dupe them into a pathetic hopefulness for "next year"--always, "next year." Still, it's a kind of reassurance that the supreme being of the prairie at least proves his presence by showing an interest in his subjects--even if it is a malicious interest; even if man is only his play-thing. Nietzsche has an interesting comment in this regard. He says that God is the supreme artist, "amoral, recklessly creating and destroying, realizing himself indifferently in whatever he does or undoes, ridding himself by his acts of the embarrassment of his riches and the strain of his internal contradictions. Thus the world was made to appear, at every instant, as a successful solution of God's own tensions."[11]

In "The Whiteness of the Whale" chapter of Moby-Dick, Ishmael tries to explain why, to him, the most appalling thing about the giant whale is its whiteness. First, he makes a great catalogue listing some of the more pleasing aspects of whiteness. He describes how whiteness enhances beauty; how it is a symbol of regality, a symbol of joy; how it is a symbol of purity and divinity and spotlessness and power--"yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of a panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood. . . . Bethink thee of the albatross: whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature."[12] Ishmael then goes on to list many examples wherein whiteness elicits a response of terror. An Albino man, for example, is strangely hideous. We associate whiteness with the pallor of death, and we always think of ghosts as white. Ishmael concludes his lengthy catalogue wondering why it is that whiteness

> is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind.
>
> Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the depths of the milky way? Or is it that, in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows--a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink?[13]

Mrs. Bentley seems to have the same appalled response to whiteness as does Ishmael. And, on the holiday trip to Paul's brother's ranch, which is in the heart of the prairie wilderness, she senses a mute blankness full of meaning in the whiteness of the hills. It is during this sojourn in the heart of the prairie that her imagination extends itself to its very limits as she tries to comprehend the concept of infinity. Those limits are reached when she confronts, in different words, but essentially the same idea as Ishmael's, a colorless, all-color of atheism from which she shrinks. The inexplicably alien and frightening quality of whiteness is not limited to an appearance in this section of the work only. It is carefully prepared for in Mrs. Bentley's view of Judith, and in Judith's relationship with Philip.

"White" appears in virtually every description Mrs. Bentley makes of Judith. And the only time her whiteness is associated with innocence, the reference is consciously ironic because Judith and Philip have already committed adultery. Here is a typical example of how Mrs. Bentley sees her: "She gives a peculiar impression of whiteness while you're talking to her, fugitive whiteness, that her face seems always just to have shed. The eyes are fine and sensitive, but you aren't aware of them at first. Her smile comes so sharp and vivid that it almost seems there's a wince with it. I mentioned the whiteness to Philip when we came home, and he had noticed it too. He tries to find words to describe it, and wonders could it be put on paper" (11). There is a suggestion that Judith's whiteness associates her with what Ishmael calls God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature. For, during that service on the last Sunday in April, when most everyone else is unnerved by the wind, "Judith seemed to respond to it, ride up with it, feel it the way a singer feels an orchestra. There was something feral in her voice, that even the pace and staidness of her hymn could not restrain" (38). So, Judith is other-worldly--primitive atavistic, more a child of nature than an ordinary human personality. Her surname, "West," enhances her oneness with the essential spirit of the prairie. And Philip underlines her other-worldliness: "'She stood there all the time so white and small,' Philip said afterwards. 'Unaware of herself.'" (38). I have pointed out the similarity Mrs. Bentley emphasizes between Philip and Joe Lawson. But Philip has stronger ties with Judith. Not only because together they conceive a child; not only because they both have dreamed similar dreams of escaping the narrow rural world, and have both become victims of practical circumstance; not only because Philip reflects Judith's whiteness--he is consistently "white-lipped." For my purposes, the most significant relationship between them--admittedly a tenuously symbolic one--has to do with pebbles and stones. In a sense, their closest bond is a shared gesture of defiance against the Law--not the law of nature, but the Old Testament Law. And Mrs. Bentley adumbrates the shared gesture quite subtly. Early on in the work, she has tried to justify Philip's intention to use the Church as a stepping-stone to a career as an artist. In what is almost a throw-away phrase, she says: ". . . after all, could the pebbles of his disbelief do any real harm to an institution like the Church?" (18). "Pebbles" doesn't reappear in the work until, sometime in May, Judith and Mrs. Bentley take a walk along the railroad track.

> . . . we walked up the railroad track about a mile, and then sat down against a bank where we couldn't feel the wind. We stayed there till it was dark. I told her about Steve and the store accounts and what Horizon thinks. She sat tossing pebbles at a big white stone across the track, and when I finished said that she thought a man like Mr. Bentley could be trusted to do what was right.
>
> I laughed at her earnestness, and said, 'Even preachers aren't infallible. You don't know him yet.'
>
> But letting her handful of pebbles fall she insisted, 'I think I do, though. And I think I'd trust him.'
>
> Then, tossing her pebbles across the track again, she talked about herself for a while . . . (55-56)

As the passage continues, Judith explains why she wants to stay free of the farm, and all through her explanation she is "intent on her pebbles." The word is surely reiterated often enough to call attention to itself. Three months later, Philip and Mrs. Bentley take the same walk. And again, 'pebbles' is rhetorically highlighted:

> At the ravine the rain was coming harder. We slipped and crawled down the muddy bank, and huddled for shelter in the channel-bed, with a little turf-cliff beetling over us. He picked up a handful of pebbles, and started throwing them at a small white rock on the far side of the ravine. He took careful aim, made a little clicking sound with his lips for every hit. Most of them were hits. If you hadn't known him you'd have said that pebbles were his favorite sport. (118)

As they talk, Mrs. Bentley reminds Philip that, if they save a thousand dollars, he can leave the Church. His response is a laugh--"A laugh like all his pebbles clicking quick and hard one after the other on the rock across the ravine, a dead, vacant laugh that he intended to be reckless." Philip, it seems, has decided to adopt a cynical, devil-may-care attitude to life. When Mrs. Bentley apologizes for always having hindered him, here is his response: "He sat a minute tossing pebbles at the stone again, then without looking at me said, 'If a man's a victim of circumstances he deserves to be.'" (119). The rhetorical reiteration of "pebbles," the correspondence between Judith's and Philip's gestures, cannot be accidental. The two excerpts have been very carefully composed. Therefore, I do not think it is wild speculation to suggest that the two white stones might remind us of Joshua's "Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spoke unto us: it shall be, therefore, a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God." The reminder is underscored when, just before she dies, Judith is found "resting on a stone pile, cold and ill already, and wandering in her mind" (161).

In terms of Old Testament Law, Philip's and Judith's act of defiance is easily specified. They break the seventh commandment: Thou shalt not commit adultery. Judith is punished with death. But punishment isn't really the point. The point is that--given what Judith, with her strange whiteness, represents--in coming together with her, Philip has reverted to a primitivism. By primitivism here, I mean something more feral than the agrarian primitivism of Fruits of the Earth. Now, in a primitive state, there are no ethical laws. What happens to El Greco,[14] the wolf-hound, illustrates that about the only operative law in a state of primitivism is the predatory law, the law of survival of the fittest.

And man cannot exist in community without ethical laws. The absence of an ethical construct means virtual spiritual death for man. This is what Mrs. Bentley learns during the sojourn in the heart of the prairie wilderness. As she, Paul, and Philip are on their way to Paul's brother's ranch, they pass through empty land; they "leave the farms and wheat lands fifty miles away, and drive through white dry grass that throws back the glare of the sun and burns your eyes like sand" (92). The height of land rises, and, abruptly, they are on the brink of a valley. "Beyond there are the hills, rising steep and buttress-like to our own level, their smooth, rounded contours white with sun and sand. Like skulls, suggests Paul--skulls that once were mountains" (92). There is just a touch of Conrad's Heart of Darkness--except we must substitute whiteness for darkness--in Mrs. Bentley's response to this wilderness: "--it was as if I were entering dead, forbidden country, approaching the lair of terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls. . . . I stood rooted a moment, imagining shapes in the darkness closing in on me, and then with a whole witches' Sabbath at my heels turned and made a bolt for the house" (95-96). As Ralph Freedman has said, in the lyrical mode, actions are turned into scenes which embody recognition. Shortly after Mrs. Bentley's flight from the unspecified terror lurking among the skulls, when she has had a chance to reflect, to synthesize her sensational response into some kind of conceptual construct, she articulates this recognition of how humanity must, of necessity, conceive of the nature of the supreme being:

> We've all lived in a little town too long. The wilderness here makes us uneasy. I felt it first the night I walked alone along the river bank--a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us. A Main Street is such a self-sufficient little pocket of existence, so smug, compact, that

> here we feel abashed somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the way they sleep. We climb them, but they withstand us, remain as serene and unrevealed as ever. The river slips past, unperturbed by our coming and going, stealthily confident. We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude--we think a force or presence into it--even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us--for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness where we may have no meaning at all. (99-100)

"We may have no meaning at all." This is like Ishmael's colorless, all-colored atheism from which we shrink. For, without meaning, life is chaos. Without meaning, life has no form; existence has no identifiable purpose. Without meaning, self is annihilated. So, prairie man absolutely requires the community, with all its restrictions and limitations, to give him a moral nature--to give him an ethical construct by which his behaviour can be judged as right or wrong. For, if there is judgement, there must be something meaningful on which to base judgement. Prairie man knows the nature of the deity best by imaginatively projecting his own view of the deity. In a sense, God is created, not in the image of man, but in the images of man's quasi-divine imagination. Then, the relationship between man and the deity is codified by man's formal acceptance of an ethical construct that accords with his formalized view of God.

But that view must derive, at least in part, from man's perception of the land. And the prairie is alien, unfriendly. Early on, Paul has voiced the opinion that religion is nothing but man's attempt to assert his own meaning and importance in the face of a blind, uncaring universe. But Paul is wrong, because he says that the gods prairie man "discovered" are "powerful, friendly gods--on his side" (19). Mrs. Bentley is more perceptive. She understands that, given the setting, and without taking any other aspects of prairie life into consideration, the force or presence prairie man thinks into existence is hostile and antagonistic.

So, the relationship between prairie man and his God is one of permanent, poised tension--the sense of poised tension Mrs. Bentley evokes when she says: "The sky had a fragile, crystal look, as if a touch or breath might bring it round our heads in tinkling ruin" (19). Of course, there are personal aspects that inevitably colour man's conception of intangible things. As I have suggested earlier, the themes of the work are all involved in one another, and I have tried to separate out only one of them. Mrs. Bentley's recognition, excerpted above, might stand as a kind of definitive cadence to the abstract religious theme. It is partially recapitulated, later on, when Mrs. Bentley walks out into the landscape on Christmas Eve, and senses a presence in the wintry earth and sky:

> It was as if a sea with an angry swell had suddenly been frozen by the moon. The stars looked bright and close, like pictures you see of tropical stars, yet the sky itself was cold and northern. Everything seemed aware of me. Usually when a moonlit winter night is aware of you it's a bitter, implacable awareness, but tonight it was only curious and wondering. It gave me a lost, elemental feeling, as if I were the first of my kind to ever venture there.
>
> The hollows and crests of the drifts made the walking hard, and half a mile from town I perched on a fence post that stood up about a foot from the snow. I sat so still that a rabbit sprinted past not twenty feet in front of me, and a minute later, right at my feet, there was the breathlike shadow of a pursuing owl. I had been climbing a little all the time I walked, so that I could see the dark straggle of Horizon now below me like an island in the snow. A rocky, treacherous island, I told myself, that had to have five lighthouses. (148)

It is a radiant night, and the kind of night seemingly very appropriate for the birth of the Christ-child, for the ambient presence is "curious and wondering" and suggests innocence. Mrs. Bentley, too, seems to have entered into a state of primitive innocence, for she is conjecturally the first of her kind in the pure-white setting. But the moment the rabbit and the pursuing owl enter the picture, we are reminded what primitivism involves. Whether she likes it or not, Mrs. Bentley needs the town. Lighthouses are, after all, life-preservative. To refuse to approach near them is to remain out at sea, away from community, away from what gives life a meaningful form. And to approach them without heeding their warning lights is to invite certain disaster.

The fact that it is Christmas Eve might suggest the possibility of grace--the possibility that the ground-bass Old Testament view of God as Power and Law will be replaced by a figuring of God as Benevolent Love. But, as I have suggested earlier, although Christ might possess a genuine power of veto over the Law, it is most unlikely that, on the prairie, he will exercise it. In the concluding pages of the work, there is a deeply buried implication that, for the prairie dweller, Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is, as yet, a meaningless sacrifice. Just prior to the following excerpt, Mrs. Bentley has been walking along Main Street, towards the five elevators again, and she has been reminiscing about all that has happened in the past year.

> I stood against the south wall of the elevator, letting the wind nail me there. It was a dark, deep wind; like a great blind tide it poured to the north again. The earth where I stood was like a solitary rock in it. I cowered there with a sense of being unheeded, abandoned.
>
> I've felt that way so many times in a wind, that it's rushing past me, away from me, that it's leaving me lost and isolated. Back at my table staring into the lamp I think how the winds and tides of life have left me just the same, poured over me, round me, swept north, south, then back again. And I think of Paul, and wonder might it have been different if we had known each other earlier. Then the currents might have taken me and fulfilled me. I might not still be nailed by them against a heedless wall. (159-160)

Once again, the self-reflexive, recurring rhythm of the sense of insignificance; once again, the self-reflexive sense of the outcast. I think Mrs.

Bentley's feeling of loneliness and isolation here is more a result of her thinking about Paul than of her thinking about the indifference of God. But what interests me in this excerpt is the image of Mrs. Bentley nailed against a heedless wall. It is a strangely Christ-like image. But an image of meaningless sacrifice. A true prairie writer, Ross eschews following the tendency of Christian art which moves through contradiction to forms of harmony, reconciliation, catharsis, and transfiguration. In As For Me and My House, we have the sense that nothing really changes. Through Mrs. Bentley's lyrical point of view, we see movement from one tension-imbued stasis to another. An over-view of all of the passages where she touches on the nature of the deity, and the nature of man's relationship with the deity--what we can't know except indirectly, and what is made doubly indirect by the interposition of her mind between us and both the tangible and the intangible worlds that she sees--gives the impression of a very ambiguous sense of tonal organization; a sense of minor qualitative change without quantitatively measurable forward progress. There is no full resolution into one clear tonality. And it is easily possible to project a differently set but a basically similar sequence of stases in the future life of the Bentleys. The hall-mark of the work is its careful composition. There is so little that changes, yet the work is not lifeless. All its vitality is in the flux and flow of images. In a sense the work is what it describes--the mode of mutability that is cyclically eternal and therefore always present. The oneness still prevails.

II

> My God, my god, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. . . . Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All they who see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. . . . Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, like a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I may count all by bones; they look and stare upon me. . . . Deliver my soul from the sword; my only one from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the wild oxen.
>
> --Psalms 22: 1-21

Psalm 22 has been referred to as "a graphic picture of death by crucifixion."[15] It is the Old Testament type which is literally fulfilled in the New Testament antitype. It is a Psalm of metamorphosis, for, at verse 22, the singer shifts his emphasis from suffering to resurrection; from pleading to praise. The sufferer is no longer an outcast, no longer a subject of humiliation: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee." The singer goes on to prophecy that, as a result of the suffering, "all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord." There are allusions to Psalm 22 throughout Robert Kroetsch's The Words of my Roaring--not just to the "roaring" of the opening verse, but to the poetry of suffering and humiliation in the first twenty-one verses. The allusions are, I think, an effective index of the modality of The Words of my Roaring. So, while the excerpt from Psalm 22 is still immediate enough for comparative reference, I shall list the allusions to suffering and humiliation before I make any further comment on the form of the work. In the first chapter, when Johnnie tries to sneak into the Coulee Hill hall to hear Doc Murdoch's campaign speech, Doc spots him and says: "'. . . my opponent has wormed his way in here uninvited, fragrant with stale beer--.'"[16] Finding himself the focus of three hundred pairs of eyes, Johnnie thinks: "What could I possibly say? I who could not so much as find a place to sit down. Not a corner to hide in, not a hole to swallow me up. Sweat was beginning to pour down my neck . . . my armpits were awash" (5). And he goes on: "I wanted simply to disappear. I slouched into myself, trying to conceal my huge frame. . . . I had to go worming in and do my scrapping from the back row. . . . There I stood, humiliated; a man who cannot abide humiliation" (6-7). When Doc Murdoch pours himself a glass of water, Johnnie thinks: ". . . my throat was drier than the ditches I'd noticed on the drive out from my happy home in Notikeewin" (8). When he flees the hall, after uttering his fateful "'Mister, how would you like some rain?'" Johnnie tells his beer parlour companions he is "drought-stricken and parched." And he starts ordering rounds for the house. "I had to, the pain still knocking in my breast" (10). When the crowd from the hall swells the crowd in the beer parlour, Johnnie is the butt of teasing because of his indirect promise of rain. And he thinks: "This time I could feel little fragments of laughter pricking my skin. Sheer humiliation. . . . Splinters of laughter pierced my soul" (14). Irritated, self-defensive, and a little drunk, he says: "Hell, yes. Sure I said it'll rain. I promise you that, you clodhoppers. You prairie chickens. And when it's so goddamned wet you can't drive to the polling booths, I hope you'll be men enough to walk, wade or swim so you can make a cross for John Backstrom" (15). A cross. Johnnie might have said, make an "x."

Allusions to the suffering and humiliation evoked in Psalm 22 appear less frequently in the subsequent chapters. In the second chapter, the morning after the accident, Johnnie is bruised and hung-over: "My tongue was a dead fish swelling in the heat of my mouth. A wood rasp; it tore at my throat when I tried to swallow; it sawed at my teeth" (32). In the third chapter, when Johnnie tries to do some electioneering amongst the hand-out line-up, the fretful crowd starts booing. "It was quite a shocking experience. People booed me, Johnnie J. Backstrom" (44). Later the same morning, when Johnnie goes for coffee with Helen, he imagines how people would have reacted if he had driven up in a Chevy like Helen's: ". . . there would have been a riot; people would have branded me a criminal, a thief; parts of my anatomy would have been flung to the pack of dogs . . ." (48-49). The most significant and explicit allusion appears in the fifth chapter, when the young clown, who, as I shall indicate later, is closely identified with Johnnie, is too slow in sidestepping the monstrous black bull. Johnnie thinks: "I guess I closed my eyes for the next few seconds. But I was seeing it just the same. The body mangled and ripped by those gouging horns, the innocent figure mutilated, rolled and trampled in the stinking dust. The spirit struck into frantic despair; I saw it all right. Without so much as peeking, I saw and I saw" (106). Moments later, bending over the clown's broken body while the gaping crowd presses close, Johnnie notices that "the clown was very thin. His costume was baggy and had billowed when he ran, but he was skin and bones" (107). In the evening of the same day, at the barn dance, Johnnie describes himself as he finishes the first dance with Helen: "I was left standing alone in the middle of the floor, dozens of couples swirling around me, dozens of heels snapping at me like the teeth and jaws of a pack of dogs" (130). Moments later, Johnnie is beset upon for the "ladies' choice" dance: ". . . all of a sudden twenty women were grabbing at me, not too careful where or how they took hold. I had a terrible impulse, an embarrassing impulse, to cup one hand over that part of my anatomy which I least wanted to see mutilated" (132-133). The final allusion--with, of course, the exception of reiterated "roarings"--appears in the final chapter. Johnnie is looking at the little prophet, who is also rather closely identified with him, and thinking: "His clothes were rags, they were hardly decent, they hardly covered his nakedness. . . . In another week he'd be stark naked; no wonder he wanted the world to end" (190).

The intermittent allusions might indicate that, like Psalm 22, The Words of my Roaring deals in metamorphosis. But there is an important difference between the movement of the Psalm and the movement of Kroetsch's work. Kroetsch does not show a complete shift in emphasis from humiliation and suffering to deliverance; from pleading to praise; from the sense of the outcast to the sense of "brethren." The point at which the emphasis might have shifted is during the "clown" scene, at the stampede. Up until this point, Johnnie is ridiculed and taunted--as the walleyed farmer habitually says, "How's the weather up there, Shorty?"--and his inner anguish has driven him to crying, to "sobbing away like a baby. For the second time in as many days" (97). But, during the aftermath of the clown's mutilation, Johnnie becomes a leader. He begins to preach in parables, and he mesmerizes the crowd. "People were crawling up on the corral rails to hear me better. They were standing on car fenders and car roofs, just to get a better look. Johnnie Backstrom was wound up and going. Even the cowboys were listening. The very bucking horses and the wild steers were listening, by the lovely Jesus" (110). From this point on, Johnnie is no longer the object of general, public contumely. And, by the end of the work, he is transformed, in the eyes of the people, into a god-like figure. People want to touch his hand, to hold up their children to him. But only in the eyes of the people is Johnnie transformed. The allusions to suffering and humiliation continue to appear, even after the pivot-scene which changes his public stature. To the very end of the work, he hurts; he roars with very real human pain. So, The Words of my Roaring is a compromise--I think, a successful one--between metamorphosis and mimesis. Kroetsch makes Johnnie into a figure that approaches archetype, but he fully realizes Johnnie's plain humanness as well. Through Johnnie, Kroetsch presents an exploration of the same profoundly human realm Mrs. Bentley has explored in As For Me and My House, although his technique in creating the romance climate necessary for such exploration is quite different from Ross's technique. Mrs. Bentley has a vitality of existence primarily as a perceiver. She is, in a sense, distilled into pure imagination, and she functions mainly as a guide for our perception. Johnnie is made the means of envisioning intangible worlds. But he has a real personality as well as an abstract function. And, through his eyes, we see, accurately, the physical features of a characteristic prairie landscape; we sense the special atmosphere which invests the prairie scene; and we understand the influence the prairie environment has on the ordinary men and women who live within its confines. I think Kroetsch commits himself in the direction of both realism and romance in The Words of my Roaring. Through Johnnie, he evokes the complete Jamesian circuit that passes through the real and the ideal, through the directly known and the mysterious or the indirectly known, through doing and feeling. In fact, James's phrase, "not quite at the same time or to the same effect, of course, but by some need of performing his whole possible revolution, by the law of some rich passion in him for extremes," is a most appropriate miniature characterization of Johnnie. He is the epitome of the prairie paradox--wry humour, chronic irritability, endurance, and high-amplitude alternation between alarming self-confidence and poignant despair. He even asks the genetic question, 'How are the crops?'--although, admittedly, it isn't the very first question he asks Helen. So, he is an artistic re-creation of the quintessential prairie man. I mean to show how, as first-person narrator, Johnnie gives us an insight into the land and the people of the Alberta prairie; then, to illustrate something of how Johnnie functions on an abstract, symbolic level; and lastly, to indicate how Kroetsch keeps Johnnie real and human, even though Johnnie travels through that remote and neutral territory of romance.

In his chapter on Frederick Niven in The Canadian West in Fiction, McCourt writes:

> A man knowing another man well is able to characterize the other quickly and accurately because he knows what is important and what is irrelevant; but the man who knows little about another must tell all. . . . When Niven writes of his native land he writes of something that is a part of himself, and his scenes are sketched with the assurance that comes of knowing by instinct what is important. But when he writes of the Canadian scene that assurance vanishes; he relies on knowledge rather than feeling; and because he is not sure of what is important tends to crowd his canvas with unnecessary and distracting detail.[17]

In contrast to Niven, Kroetsch knows his prairie setting intimately, and re-creates it with precision, economy, and efficiency. In the following passage, for example, we are rapidly but effectively shown the bare essentials of the radical setting:

> We drove through the cooling night, and we felt pretty good, I can tell you. The crows had stopped knocking around in the sky. All day they were boss, but now it was ours. A dozen bottles of beer were ours. It was all listed under our names, we were certain, and we drove and stopped and we drove and we had to stop again.
>
> Man, it felt good, just to be half-loaded and the pressure easing up in your bladder and the old tool held firmly in the right hand. For that one beautiful moment you feel you've spent a lifetime looking for a place to pee, and here you've found it. We watered the parched earth. You could hear water running, and that was a mighty pleasant change. Oh show me the way to go home. That clear sky above all rashed over with millions of stars and the baked earth letting out the breath it had held all day; the cowshit and buckbrush and a drying slough hole scenting the air; a little rank yet fertile with hope. It felt good. . . . And wild roses in the glare of the headlights, a little dusty, but full of color because no rain had washed the petals white. The telephone line; the poles all throbbing, setting up a hum that lulled the sleepy grasshoppers. (16-17).

Sights, smells, sounds, and, with the image of the earth finally letting out the breath it has held all day, the kinesthetic sense, too. In Johnnie's easy-going colloquial idiom, it is a wonderfully sensuous passage. The reiterated "it felt good" might belie any sense of the desolation that is typically associated with the prairie setting, but there are obvious little reminders that the earth is very dry. And Johnnie knows of desolation. He evokes the appalling emptiness and strangeness of the setting when he describes how he, ironically, hasn't remembered his homeground all the while he was back East:

> I was in the East for twelve years all told. That's a fact. Why deny it? And during all that time I don't think I gave two thoughts to all those damned dirt roads running nowhere in straight lines. To all those telephone poles with their burden of wire, trying to hold the horizons together.
>
> Or the sky. That was one thing I managed to shut out of my head. Nature can be so damned unnatural. That red Who-er of a sky trying to suck you up into its own cursed hollowness. I could give you a whole damned sermon on that sky. And every

> day and always the sun, it comes bulging out of the dawn, stunning those few little plants that have somehow overnight peckered up their leaves, their petals, their stems. What a blue-eyed bitch of a country this is. (59)

In this last, there is quiet desperation and hopelessness in the image of telephone wires trying to hold the horizons together--man trying to put a coherent frame around infinity. The sky becomes a vacuum, threatening annihilation of mere mortal things, and the sun enhances the sense of threat. Kroetsch evokes the effect of the "unnatural" environment on the people who live within its confines with the same economy and efficiency with which he evokes the setting. Thus, Johnnie finds a deserted farmstead "a hard thing to look at, like looking into the torn empty sockets of vanished eyes" (179). One simile becomes a graphic, illuminating image of prairie man's suffering and defeat at the hands of alien nature. Johnnie's discovery that the walleyed farmer's house has been painted on the front, but not the sides and back, shows the prairie man's pathetic, but somehow stubborn, pride. As the saying goes, "It looks better from the road." The transience and innate futility of mortal endeavour on the abiding prairie are evoked in Johnnie's incantatory iteration of items for sale at the auction: ". . . *One new Swede saw one wagon and grain tank one 50-ft endless belt miscellaneous assortment of tools too numerous to mention misc harness collars halters 3 complete beds sausage grinder and maker one bath tub* . . . On and on. One lifetime. There it was. EVERYTHING MUST BE SOLD" (55-56). The auction list becomes a kind of stream-of-consciousness distillation of one lifetime into a flow of material items, none of them significant in themselves, but all of them enormously significant in what they stand for: mortality. The whole story of the hard effects of the prairie drought on prairie mortals is told in the imagery of the tattered straw hats and sweaty hat bands Johnnie sees in the line-up for government hand-outs of dried codfish and apples. And Johnnie thinks: "I had never in all my life noticed people's hats. Now I saw that while the men were in old hats, the women by and large were wearing their Sunday hats. It was Monday. Two or three of them even had veils on their hats. They wanted to appear prosperous here, as if they came for the free hand-outs not because it was necessary to do so but because anyone would be a fool not to pick up something that was free. I had that insight. It was quite an eye-opener" (45-46). Once again, stubborn, pathetic pride.

Driven to accept charity, driven to sell out, driven to put up a false front of pride--these are all what might be called the practical, circumstantial effects of the hostile environment on the people of the prairie. These effects are tangible proof of the influence the setting exerts. But its influence shows more significantly in intangible ways. In the following passage, the last sentence is a kind of epiphany of the insidious effect of the environment on humanity's inner, conscious life:

> I was born out here in a farmhouse, remember. The first thing you hear is the wind. And going upstairs, at the turn of the stairs in that first house; a window looked west; and westward in the summer you could see the green of a wind-break, elm and maple and Russian poplar and caragana. Things that don't grow here by nature but have to be planted and tended. And then in the fall you could see through the bare branches out across a mile of wheat stubble; a gradual rise to the horizon, a clump of poplars, a line of telephone poles along a road a mile away, and another farm finally, the closest neighbour. An old man whose wife finally went out of her mind and had to be put away. (54)

Like Mrs. Bentley, Johnnie personifies the wind, and thereby implies that nature is the mask of an inscrutable force or presence: ". . . there wasn't a windbreak ever planted that could really stop the wind. It got to the house. I always felt it was trying to say something, and I wasn't understanding. Something very sad. Then it got impatient and banged some rain on the windowpanes, just enough to make you feel cozy, and two days later it was sifting the dust past the closed windows onto the sills, making the curtains gray, covering the dining room table . . ." (54). The implication here--one that I must raise again later on--is that the inscrutable presence communicates with his human subjects via the sign language of weather. Perhaps "communicates with" isn't exactly the right phrase. Conversationally speaking, atmospheric conditions are a kind of one-sided dialogue. For the most part, the human side of the conversation must be the listening side. But this is not to say human response cannot take other forms. Johnnie both specifies and indirectly suggests what these other forms are:

> I was dreaming by the time I was big enough to know things aren't what they might be, which out here means before your pockets are very high off the ground. Christ, you have to dream out here. You've got to be half goofy--just to stay sane.
>
> I'm a great one for paradox. My reading of the Bible, I suppose; dying to be born and all that. But really, it isn't an easy place to live. Like when the wind blows black, when it's dry, you drive all day with your lights on. Great electioneering weather. The fish lose their gills in this country. The gophers come up for a bite to eat, and they crawl right into the air.
>
> I won't swear to that--but it's God's truth, you have to dream. (53)

You have to dream, simply in order to counteract the extraordinary pull of the environment, which draws the mind towards contemplation of infinity, and evacuates the meaning out of the word "self." Imaginative visions, fantasies--these are arbitrary ways of superimposing boundaried worlds on a vista that is naturally empty and frameless. As "Professor Godfrey" in Mitchell's "The Liar Hunter" suggests, the prairie man's tall tales aren't really lies. They are self-defensive attempts to make frightening phenomena less frightening by exaggerating them to the point where they appear ridiculous and laughable. So, the little bits of tall tales that are scattered throughout The Words of my Roaring are indications of Kroetsch's insight into the real nature of prairie dwellers. And there is nothing unnatural about the way the farmers elaborate their limited dreams of glory when Johnnie warns one of them he'd better start building an ark: "People started talking to each other. Of a bumper harvest and where they could get extra help in a hurry. Of shopping trips to the city and winter clothes for the wife and kids. Of paying off the interest on the mortgage for another year . . ." (15). Nor is there anything unnatural in the way the farmers respond at the sight of Doc Murdoch's new Chevy: "Those people should have expressed their indignation. Instead, they started speculating. One good crop, this fellow said. One decent harvest, somebody answered. Just let me land one forty-bushel crop by Jesus, somebody practically cried aloud. Pretty soon the whole place was humming. I might as well have been a stick of wood. People got out of line to finger the pieces of new machinery. Hopes rose. I believe I could have made my fortune right there, selling raincoats" (49). The point I wish to make here is that, in describing the prairie setting, in describing the influence of the unique setting on the people who live within its confines, Kroetsch has certainly not sacrificed the community, the, in James's words, "'related' sides of situations," too rashly. Despite the fact that many of the minor figures in The Words of my Roaring are more symbolic than realistic, there is a strong element of reality in Kroetsch's general picture of prairie life.

But it cannot be said that the work as a whole surrounds its theme, its figures and images, purely with the air of reality. For one reason, Johnnie is almost preternaturally alive. I hesitate to call him "an archetype of humanity," for the phrase renders him incomprehensibly abstract. Let me say only that he is radically human. He seems to represent the extremity of every human attribute, every human capacity for doing and feeling. Voraciously sensual, he says, "'I consume and I consume. Chapter and verse. Newspaper columns that bulge with advice. The want ads. Food. Hats. Socks. Gasoline. Women. Beer. Hardstuff. I have a large jaw and mouth, my appetite is healthy. My eyes are twenty-twenty and so eager they hate to sleep. My ears are wax-free and larger than normal. I consume and consume.'" (95). Since he is radically human, Johnnie is radically fallible. With all good intentions of "trying to solve the problems of the damned world" (67), he ends by deeply hurting the two people he most deeply loves. His capacity for betrayal is signalized by his middle name, Judas. But, if he is capable of inflicting great hurt, he is also capable of great suffering. As he says, "it was my boyhood fate to have a body that couldn't be hurt. I got a dozen scars, sure. But the pain was always in my soul" (24). Sometimes--especially when he speaks of pain--he seems to speak for Everyman. Thus, after the accident, as he pounds on Doc's door, he thinks: "Silence is my business, I deal in silence; and its prologue, sorrow. Sorrow and grief. And then I knocked harder. I had to. Not just for myself; for all of us. For all who sat in that draughty room, the sick and the hurting" (23). But I think he has a beautifully simple and logical justification for speaking for Everyman. Six-four in his stocking feet, he says, "'I've got more mortality than other people.'" (161). Sometimes he speaks as the voice of chaos, the voice of sheer, undirected, unformalized life-energy. Thus, he tries to explain his "temporary seizure of wrath and anguish" (100) that results in his smashing the undamaged fender of his hearse:

> That mysterious thing seized me; that longing for the old chaos. That old earth, without form and full of the void. The car shed rang; it rang with the din of my anguish, but inside me was a worse din. I stopped pounding a couple of times and straightened up, to try and gasp some air into my lungs, and

> still I was being deafened; still the din and the roar.
>
> Sometimes it seems that chaos is the only order. To hell with mealtime and bedtime and worktime and churchtime and thinktime. I was tempted to throw in lifetime with the lot. Add them all to that accumulation in the car shed. I needed chaos, the old chaos, and that hammer and fender weren't enough. (101)

Johnnie's anguish usually stems from the frustration he feels at not being able to answer--there is no clear answer--the hard questions he raises during his "thinktimes." Questions such as "Why must the good be hammered and nailed into oblivion?" (145). Again, such questions are near to the heart of Everyman. But not everyone has the capacity for the depth of Johnnie's response to the realization that life is short: "Good God, life is short. Life is short, short, my body cried. So live, it said. Live, live. Rage, roar" (144). Jonah Bledd--not quite full-blooded--is, for example, one who lives timidly. Johnnie's raging and roaring approach to life makes it impossible for him to be, as Jonah is, a "basically good man." "Rage" and "roar" are extremely active verbs, and Johnnie is radically a man of action; radically impatient with inaction, as he shows when he shouts at the radio-voice of Applecart: "'Do something! For the love of bloody Christ, don't just talk! _Do_ something for a change!'" (93). His capacity for action is signalized by his professional title, undertaker. He is not simply a man whose business it is to prepare the dead for burial and to take charge of funerals. He is one who undertakes; one who essays, attempts; one who assumes responsibility. And, since "rage" and "roar" connote destructive force, Johnnie's undertakings frequently result in his doing much damage. Since he has great human capacity for action, he becomes greatly responsible, and has, therefore, great need of forgiveness--indemnity--exemption from liabilities or penalties incurred by his actions. Again, Johnnie speaks for Everyman when he acknowledges "the contradiction that is man; the mind that wrestles with black despair, the spirit that soars" (31). Contradiction, paradox, duality--these are all major aspects in the organization of the work. And I think that these aspects have their roots in Genesis, to which Johnnie certainly alludes when he voices his longing for the old chaos, the old earth, without form and full of the void: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep . . . (Genesis 1: 1-2). God has given the earth form by creating polar, complementary spheres: light and dark; land and water; ultimately, life and death. In the same way that we cannot know light without its complement, dark, we cannot know life without its complement, death. Hence, it is appropriate that Jonah Bledd doesn't seem to be emphatically dead, because he was never really emphatically alive. As Johnnie says, because of the fact that Jonah's dead body isn't present at his funeral, "Existence itself had earned suspicion" (139). When Johnnie voices his longing for the old chaos, he articulates the futile but general human desire to circumvent death. His sense of his own great vitality is complemented by his sense of his mortality, and one of his more important functions as a representative figure is to celebrate death and, thereby, quite logically, celebrate life: "A priest celebrates a Mass, that much I know. But does he celebrate a burial Mass? Very odd. But perhaps he should. Perhaps he should. I wanted to poke Murdoch in the ribs and say, I, too, Johnnie Backstrom, am much given to celebration" (141). It is the kind of celebration of life through death that Dylan Thomas evokes when he writes: "Do not go gentle into that good night./ Rage, rage against the dying of the light."[18]

I have been describing Johnnie as something of a representative figure without indicating how Kroetsch creates the special climate in which

Johnnie can be conceived of as both an embodiment of a view of life and a large replica of life itself. In the evocation of the necessary neutral or remote atmosphere, "chaos" becomes an important technical term, and other pointers of the technique Kroetsch uses to create an imaginative climate that is remote from reality are all present in Johnnie's description, excerpted above, of how humanity maintains its sanity in an alien environment: ". . . you have to dream out here. You've got to be half goofy--just to stay sane . . . paradox . . ." (53). Dreams, the implication of irrationality, the fracture of logic that paradox implies--these are all aspects of surrealism. The major scenes of The Words of my Roaring are steeped in an air of surreality, although Kroetsch is not quite as thorough-going a surrealist as he would have to be to approximate surrealism as Hauser defines it:

> Surrealism . . . developed into an art which made the paradox of all form and the absurdity of all human existence the basis of its outlook. . . . Surrealism . . . expresses its belief that a new knowledge, a new truth and a new art will arise from chaos, from the unconscious and the irrational, from dreams and the uncontrolled regions of the mind. . . . The basic experience of the surrealists consists in the discovery of a 'second reality' which, although it is inseparably fused with ordinary, empirical reality, is nevertheless so different from it that we are only able to make negative statements about it and to point to the gaps and cavities in our experience as evidence for its existence. . . . It is also this experience of the double-sidedness of existence, with its home in two different spheres, which makes the surrealists aware of the peculiarity of dreams and induces them to recognize in the mixed reality of dreams their own stylistic ideal. The dream becomes the paradigm of the whole world-picture, in which reality and unreality, logic and fantasy, the banality and sublimation of existence, form an indissoluble and inexplicable unity. The meticulous naturalism of the details and the arbitrary combination of their relationships which surrealism copies from the dream, not only express the feeling that we live on two different levels, in two different spheres, but also that these regions of being penetrate one another so thoroughly that the one can neither be subordinated to nor set against the other as its antithesis . . .[19]

As I have suggested earlier, surrealism is essentially a romantic art.

"Inexplicably mixed realities" is a way of saying that the actual and the imaginary have been totally, subjectively, merged; and each is totally imbued with the nature of the other. The Words of my Roaring is not wholly dream-like--or, perhaps I should say, nightmarish. Empirical reality is not always fused with some second level of existence. But Kroetsch opens the possibility for frequent explorations of a realm that is remote from empirical reality by, in the same way that McCourt endows Neil Fraser with romance sensibility, endowing Johnnie Backstrom with surrealist sensibility. The chief difference between McCourt's and Kroetsch's technique, and the reason why the latter achieves artistic success while the former fails, is that Kroetsch doesn't continuously repudiate his central figure's unique imaginative view of the world. Rather, he carefully sets the stage for it. Kroetsch's narrative technique is a fluent combination of stream-of-consciousness and straight-forward reverie juxtaposed with passages of dialogue. He creates the kind of narrative milieu in which Johnnie is always potentially free to take an imaginative perspective--one which permits us to see experience liberated, disengaged--in James's words, "exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it." Perhaps the following will provide a partial indication of the way Kroetsch's narrative technique provides for potential freedom of imaginative association. Johnnie has his Atwater-Kent turned on, and he and a few interested citizens are listening to Applecart, "the voice of the prairies" (37), preaching. And Johnnie is thinking:

> I was the only person in the constituency who was well enough known to run against Murdoch. Or at least I made this observation to people and a few days later they made it to me; you know how people are. But the minute I remembered how ambitious men must sully their hands to achieve fine goals, I was plunged into another depression. Because those same people who failed to oppose the nomination when Bledd made it--those same people

> had ignored a simple fact. Old Murdoch helped people coming into the world. I saw them out. And that didn't leave me with a lot of active supporters.
>
> 'It's a total wreck,' my wife said. (36)

As it stands, Elaine's remark is a non sequitur to Johnnie's reverie. We know that she is referring to the hearse. But the juxtaposition of her remark with Johnnie's speculations quite naturally and easily releases the suggestion that the "it" refers to the world. Throughout the work, the flow of narration remains free of the limitations of logical sequence. Consequently, the stage is always prepared for Johnnie to indulge his surrealist sensibility, and imaginatively move into a realm that is remote from empirical reality.

Johnnie's surrealist sensibility is explicit in his keen sensitivity to paradox, duality, contradiction. And, frequently, he voices the view that human existence is absurd. In one instance, when he reflects on the wonderful nights he has spent with Helen in Doc's garden, he self-satirically lists all the difficulties the sex-urge can get a man into, one of which includes "risking the creation of further ridiculous life" (157). And, as the realization dawns on him that he is "to be father," he thinks: "I remembered touching my wife's belly with my giant clumsy hands. Touching with one finger, then with two, then with all five. Feeling the baby move. Little kicks and pokes and jabs going on inside. Somersaults and handsprings. Rehearsal. For the foolishness that is life. Let me out. Let me at them" (184). His surrealist sensibility is implicit in the way he sees the settings of the major scenes of the work. For example, from his point of view, the auction sale scene is a "chaos of furniture and household goods in front of the farmer's house" (80). With chaos ambient, there is nothing anomalous about the strange little prophet figure who appears "out of nowhere" (79) and disappears just as mysteriously. The absurdity of the interchange between him and Johnnie is enhanced by Johnnie's "rocking like a madman in that rocking chair" (81) he has expropriated for the afternoon. The stampede setting is similarly chaotic. To pick up on a passage excerpted earlier: "I needed chaos, the old chaos, and that hammer and fender weren't enough. So as I say, I went to the stampede" (101). The stampede is evoked as a kind of celebration of all mortality in community:

> The Wednesday half-holiday doesn't begin until high noon, so by one o'clock the cars were really rolling in, from up and down the line and from everywhere. People came in wagons also, and buggies and trailers, and they tied the horses to the wheels and put out hay, as if the horses themselves should join in the celebration. A bunch of Indians showed up from some place, a whole tribe with all their ponies and little kids and the men with their hair braided and the women with papooses. Cowboys swaggered around in pairs or maybe three together, or maybe one of them with a cowgirl or a guitar, which always drew a lot of attention. The whole place was a whirl of dust. (103)

In this cyclonic atmosphere, Johnnie begins to be identified with some of the focal figures in the crowd. For example, the young boy who finishes out the ride on the monstrous black bull and who makes "points all the way for style" (105) has a linguistic association with Johnnie because, earlier, Johnnie has observed of himself: "They liked my style; style is something a politician must have" (88). As for the young cowboy, Johnnie comments: "He had got onto something and he didn't know how to get off. He'd planned on being bucked off, I suppose, and here he was riding the worst animal of the lot, and he wasn't losing. That was his trouble" (105). This last is a prophetic comment on Johnnie's political predicament. His promise of rain is a promise he cannot renege without complete loss of face, but its a promise he hasn't the capacity to fulfil on his own. He has anticipated being defeated by Doc Murdoch, but he begins to look like a winner. And the closer he comes to winning, the closer he comes to betraying a man whom he has always loved as a father. Like the young cowboy, the clown who saves the boy's life is a kind of symbolic extension of Johnnie. For one reason, he wears a black derby, and, since, on this occasion, Johnnie is not wearing the black derby he usually wears, it is as if the clown has Johnnie's hat. For another, the clown is Johnnie's size, and Johnnie is acutely aware of their similarity: "This clown was very exceptional. You don't often see a big clown. Not really big. This one--well, I might as well be honest--he was crowding six-three or six-four. He almost didn't fit into his barrel, which I suppose was part of the joke. I enjoy a good laugh as well as anybody else; but this was very painful for me to watch" (106). In the same way that "the clown had captured all of us. We wouldn't move" (107), Johnnie captivates the huge crowd. And he cements the connection between himself and the clown when he says, "'. . . my dear friends--you should vote for the clown.'" (112). I think the point of the association is that Johnnie, like the clown, is sacrificed for the sake of the public. The clown has died for the sake of public entertainment; Johnnie abrogates his most cherished personal relationships in order to step into the role of "restorer" for his constituents.

It is as "restorer" or rain-maker that Johnnie has the most abstract function in the work. For, in this role, he seems to establish a relationship with the supreme being of the prairie. As McCourt has said, the prairie man hesitates to blame the Almighty for his miseries. There is a very simple reason for the hesitation. Suppose that God has deliberately "visited" his subjects with drought. Then it is natural to ask, "Why? Why this punishment?" The most immediate answer is "Original Sin." But it is a harsh answer, because, if its awful import is fully realized, it places a terrible burden of guilt on everyone alike. As Johnnie says, "I was doomed. Like the wicked people in some of those stories. Like everybody, I sometimes think" (34). One of the reasons the prophet figure causes such uneasiness at the auction sale is that he clearly implies that the drought is punishment for Original Sin:

> 'The sinners are doing the suffering they earned.' He held a very high opinion of himself, that sawed-off windbag.
>
> 'We didn't do anything,' the farmer broke in, 'but try to make a living and keep our noses clean.'
>
> The prophet let out a maniacal squeak of a laugh. 'You didn't do anything!' You could tell, he should have been under lock and key. 'That's right,' he said. 'You get punished for being innocent.' He felt obliged to explain. 'Oh that is a ripper and a honey! You get punished for being innocent!' (80)

Rather than attempt to apprehend and accept the concept of Original Sin, humanity usually finds a less trying way of explaining its miseries. But, as the following passage shows, Johnnie doesn't lapse easily into a more comfortable mode of explanation. The excerpt is from the auction scene, where Johnnie has got the "insane idea" that he needs the old prophet's Model-A. The scene is tragically absurd, for Johnnie bids, impulsively, out of sheer anguish:

> A pain was pressing within me, and I had found a way to let that pain out. Each nod of my head was a hiccup of the soul, letting out a gasp of pain. End of the world be damned, who could believe such crap? Sinner be damned, who was a sinner? Was the water guilty that drowned Jonah? Was the wind guilty; the wind that turned the fields to dust? Was the sun guilty? Why should I answer questions? When did I get to ask questions? The sickle be damned and the reaper be damned. Who was the judge in the first place? A man is free. Each man is free. And I wouldn't be pushed and shoved and stepped on. I have my rights. Words were in me, knocking to be let out. Pain was in me, and I let out the pain. Seventy, somebody said. I nodded my head. Judgement be damned and mercy be damned. Eighty, somebody said. I nodded my head. My soul had hiccups and my head was nodding . . . (86)

In this instance, bidding becomes an offering of questions which are beyond human answering. But, if nature is mask of God, Johnnie's accumulated questions bring him very close to an impeachment of God here. As he campaigns for election--a doubly significant word, for it involves the issue of salvation and damnation--he ostensibly takes the same tack as Applecart, and blames all of the prairie people's misery on the government. But, through metaphorical keys, he makes his accusation of the government an indirect accusation against God. For example, he picks up Applecart's phrase, "that red beast of a Who-er," a phrase which Applecart applies to "The Fifty Big Shots" down East, and applies it to nature: "That red Who-er of a sky trying to suck you up into its own hollowness" (59). The strange phonetical spelling of "Who-er" is enough to make the term a metaphysical conundrum, and, when it is applied to the sky, and that sky is described as a "vast empty glare of a sky that was waiting to humiliate me once more" (58), the implication that God wills Johnnie's Christ-like role as rain-maker is irresistable. There are other metaphorical keys, particularly in association with Doc. Now Doc is a native Easterner, and the East, with all its water, is a place Johnnie remembers as "'Eden. . . . The green lush old Eden.'" (58). In Doc's garden with Helen, Johnnie thinks: "The smell of that garden at night; it wasn't a prairie smell, dry and stringent, parching the insides of your nose. It was an Eastern smell, heavy enough to be seen. I said to Helen one night, 'He's done it, hasn't he? He's managed to create it right here in his own back yard--a little bit of the East.'" (158). Hence, Doc's garden approximates Eden. And when Johnnie says ". . . old Murdoch . . . made roses bloom and cherries blossom; he made plums and apricots and crab apples hang so heavy on the branches they had to be propped up--and nobody else could keep a cactus alive" (160), his emphasis on making, or creating, and his emphasis on the uniqueness of Doc's green thumb implies a god-like quality in Doc. So, in blaming the government for all the misery on the prairie, Johnnie involves Doc in the accusation, and he therefore indirectly involves God.

The suggestion that Johnnie has a somewhat direct line of communication with the supreme being of the prairie is established in two ways. First, he is rather closely identified with the prophet figure. Now this absurd little man seems to represent a combination of the dust of the prairie and the dust of mortality. Like the "blue-eyed bitch of a country this is" (59), the prophet has clean blue eyes. But, otherwise, he is a stinking "human dust storm" (79). Johnnie is identified with him through a kind of shared possession--the prophet's Model-A, his "chariot of corruption" (82) becomes "Backstrom's Model-A" (88)--and through the sense of smell; or, I should say, stench. At Jonah Bledd's funeral, Johnnie discovers that he smells about as bad as the old prophet: "My whole great body was an aching stinking reminder of my own ultimate doom. That depressed me. I hadn't had time to bathe before Mass. Not even down to the belly button, as I sometimes do when in a hury. . . . I hoped the old Doc wasn't being offended. I crossed my arms, trying to hold in my own decay, my decline. My reek" (144). It is somehow appropriate that, when the rain begins to fall, the prophet should be in the hearse with Johnnie. There is a suggestion that, come the rain, the prophet's role is fulfilled, for, as he sits in the hearse, "He was arranging his beard as if he expected to be laid out in a coffin" (188); and when he stands outside the hearse, in the rain, he looks "as if he was about to dissolve" (196). It is not very clear precisely what the prophet's role is. Nevertheless, the obscurity is in keeping with the surrealistic quality of the scenes in which he appears. I think he functions as a forcible reminder that "this, too, shall pass;" as a forcible reminder of the transience of mortal things. For, in his presence, Johnnie comes to the realization that "The earth turns on its axis, but very slowly. The flowers come and go, do what we will" (192). This cognizance of transience is followed immediately by what is, for Johnnie, a terrible epiphany: "I had nothing to do with the rain" (192). In a sense, then, it is an epiphany of Johnnie's human limitations. But the prophet figure also functions to predict the bitter irony of Johnnie's predicament in the concluding pages of the work when he says, "'It's going to rain pitchforks.'" (188). When he confronts Helen for the last time, Johnnie echoes "Raining pitchforks" (205). For him, the phrase typifies the pain he is fated to endure. Pain, because he is misconstrued by his constituents, and has to find a way to live up to their image of him; pain, because he has hurt those he loves. Early on, Johnnie has waxed indignant at the newspaper ad that says: "Win your embalming license. . . . Win, for Christ sake! Not earn, but win; in some gigantic roll of the dice, some one last shuffle of the deck" (24). Now, with the rain, in some gigantic roll of the dice, Johnnie is about to win, rather than earn, election. And the victory is, personally, very costly.

The second way in which a symbolic dialogue between Johnnie and the supreme being of the prairie is established is through Johnnie's unique gesture of prayer. Although he might be humiliated, Johnnie is not a humble man, and so he is not a kneeling man: "I refused to kneel, I look silly kneeling, I'm too big. It hurts my knees" (139). His habitual way of imploring is at once a gesture of violence and defiance, as he shows when he stands outside Doc's office door: ". . . I stood there knocking, pounding and pleading with my fists" (25). Even his yearning for Helen is evoked in imagery of suppressed violence: "She stopped fiddling with her spoon. Her long fingers became inactive and I wanted them to discover me, to come alive to my own crumpled fists" (62). So, Johnnie doesn't exactly pray for rain. He takes it upon himself to imprecate, to challenge the supreme being into making it rain. And the imagery of the work shows that his violent gesture of address to infinity is answered, as it were, with payment in kind. Thus, Johnnie stands before an appreciative audience at the stampede: "I raised both fists and shook them. The sun was just hammering down from the sky" (109); and again, moments later: "I shook my fits at the blazing, hammering sky" (112). During Jonah's funeral Mass, he remembers how, as youths, he and Jonah discussed how to avoid " a futile demonstration of desire" in church. "Jonah said praying helped. Pray be damned, I said, let it rage, let it roar" (143). In context, the reference is phallic; but it pretty well sums up Johnnie's approach to both tangible and intangible realms. A little later, during the same service, as the interminable sermon drags on, Johnnie imagines how he might deliver a powerful sermon: "I'd raise both arms up sideways from my body to command silence, the big sleeves falling back to leave my powerful fists bare-knuckled in front of the altar. Bare-knuckled and white with my clenching" (144). Not a gentle mode of address. And, in the concluding pages of the work, when the rain comes, it does not come as if in gentle answer. It comes with an echoing of Johnnie's roaring, and an answering gesture of violence: "I looked back just once and the sky in the west was positively black. As if a great fist had closed the sun's eye. As if a range of mountains had broke loose and was galloping straight at me" (188). At first Johnnie thinks the blackness is dust. He hardly dares to believe that the rain is general: "The sky overhead was now a roaring mass, a sharp line dividing the black roll of clouds from the emptiness of sky. The dust was settling, I can tell you. But I felt that one hundred yards up ahead of that black cloud that chased me, I'd be back in my drought" (193). Now, on the prairie, rainstorms are indeed violent, and so the "fist" and the "roaring" imagery might be coincidental. But Johnnie is emphatically the object of nature's violence here. And I think the payment-in-kind quality of his relationship with intangible spheres is underlined when he says: "A man my size is a large target for the brute knuckles of existence. I was being pummeled" (197). In a sense, then, Johnnie is like Mrs. Bentley. The blessed break in the weather holds out no joy for him: "My pain and misery were taking the form of the rain" (197). If pain is taken as an index of Johnnie's character, then he must be regarded as a static figure. Unlike the novelistic figure who changes and develops as the narrative unfolds, he remains essentially unchanged. On an abstract level, he represents, as he so often suggests, the common lot of mortality--"the epitome of man with his back to the wall" (93). The rain which might function to draw the community together into a normalized, amicable sphere leaves him more of an outcast than ever: "I let the binder canvas fall to the floor of the wagon; hunched I sat, stubborn against the rain, soggy and alone as a creature of the deep. It was blistering cold in the wet night, I have never been so alone" (211).

Another aspect that might be regarded as a constant index to Johnnie's unchanging character is that tendency of his to exaggerate--to make up little tall tales. Even in the miserable rain, he says, "The air we breathed was suffocating, it was so full of water. You needed gills. You could drown standing up on a raft" (197). This last is a minute echo of Johnnie's surrealistic nightmare about a rainstorm that got started and couldn't be stopped. The prefix "sur" corresponds to "super," and so "surrealism" connotes exaggeration. Thus, there is a sense in which the roots of Kroetsch's surrealism are in the bits of tall tales, with their innate illogicality and exaggeration. But the motivating factor in surrealism is the intention to re-create, artistically, imaginative expression that is uncontrolled by reason--to suggest the activities of the unconscious mind whether in dreams or in waking hours. So, the "gopher" stories and the "fish" stories are not properly surrealistic because there is a logical reason for their being told. They represent a real human tendency, and so create a tension between realism and surrealism that remains poised throughout the work. Similarly, Johnnie's exaggerations about himself--". . . I've had misery, I can tell you. Watching that damned sky. One day I made a fool remark about rain, and the next day I was getting a crick in my neck. Every time a puff of cloud blew up I fell down laughing and giggling and rolled around till I started to choke in the dust. Then I got up again. Well, I exaggerate. But I did have misery" (55)--have the effect of guaranteeing Johnnie's real humanity rather than rendering him remote from reality. They prove that, giant of a man as he is, he doesn't always have epic self-confidence. As Jesse Bier, in The Rise and Fall of American Humour, says,

> Men of real confidence never feel compelled to show off. If one does, he needs to, and that need may come from any characteristic in him except confidence. When, for instance, we arrive at the quickstand pit in old Ohio and we see a hat upon the surface and lift it and find a man under it who laughs hugely and says he's got a good horse under him, we may accept his comic boast that he will make it, though we wonder about the horse. But no trained rider on a strong, sure-footed mount along a fine turnpike on a glorious day needs to boast or exercise himself in any way. Giants in the earth are desperate men or comedians, and their extravagant claims are manifest defense mechanisms.[20]

Kroetsch invokes other techniques to keep Johnnie real and human, even as he explores that "second reality" of chaos. For example, unconscious irony in conjunction with braggadocio: ". . . I am basically not an extremely violent man, though I have been in a few fights, all of them against stupendous odds, none of which I ever lost" (89). Or, simply, unconscious irony. In the following passage, from the auction scene, Johnnie shows how the presence of the little prophet rouses his conscience, and, unwittingly, he goes on to show other human foibles:

> Without intending to I remembered beating Jonah out of a few odd cents to pay for a beer I'd ordered, and I thought of stealing my poor wife's grocery money. Stealing is one of the worst sins. You'd think some of the wealthier Burkhardts would have helped us out in a time of such vicissitudes and tribulation, but no sir, not a penny of cash. Hand-me-down maternity clothes for my wife was all, and nothing for me but a curt nod. And there I was with my hearse smashed up, my means of livelihood threatened. (81)

Worrying over the sin of stealing leads Johnnie to commit the sin of envy and thence to indulging in a very ordinary, mildly self-pitying sulk. Frequently, Kroetsch also uses ironic deflation to bring Johnnie back closer to empirical reality after moments when he has seemed particularly remote or heroic. Thus, after Johnnie makes his awesomely successful campaign speech at the stampede, Kroetsch takes him on an almost feverishly compressed tour of the mid-way arcade, where he wins at all the booths, to the cheers of the crowd he has wrapped around his little finger:

> When the applause began I raised my hand; it stopped and I walked on to the dart booth. I picked up a dart and flung it; pop went a balloon. Another dart, bang, another pop. I accepted the kewpie doll; I cradled it in one arm, people smiling, following me as I walked: I handed the doll to a man who was guarding the handle of a sledge hammer. I swung the hammer. Gong went the bell. More applause. I gave the cigar to a lady who had let out a little shriek. More laughter.
>
> And then the egg-throwing--my God, those people hurled eggs at the face sticking through the stained old bed sheet as if they expected to destroy Satan himself. (115)

Kroetsch hasn't broken the surrealistic tone with which he began the stampede scene. The rapidity of action gives the passage a dream-like movement. But, with the egg-throwing, s somewhat macabre quality colours the tone and slightly tarnishes the glow of Johnnie's captivating power. When Johnnie makes his way to the stampede-grounds gate, he heads straight for the beer parlour, which is repeatedly described as a setting of "utter chaos." But the first person Johnnie sees in the parlour is the wall-eyed farmer, who remembers the business of the unpaid-for Model-A, who calls Johnnie a "horse's petunia" (118), among other things, and who further deflates Johnnie by disillusioning him about his supposed flawless pitching in that no-hitter he has always cherished in memory.

Probably the most effective index of Johnnie's plain humanness is his reiterated desire to start again clean and become what he imagines he could ideally be. In many instances during the course of the work, he tries to take an honest look at himself, to judge squarely his shortcomings, and to promise himself he will begin to reform. In the following excerpt, he is sitting alone in the hearse after the first day's dragging for Jonah's body is done. His lively imagination has conjured up, in his term, a "spooky" picture of Jonah rising out of the water, tapping on the hearse window, asking haunting questions:

> How did you do it, Johnnie B? How did you grow up to be such a useless son of a bitch? Such a no-good useless loudmouthed blowhard son of a scarlet bitch? How did you single out the two people who mean most to you in this wide world, how did you single them out to hurt and injure and destroy?
>
> I had to answer. I had to. I turned up all the windows and still I could do nothing but hear. The waves. The wind on the leaves. The tapping, tapping. An apology would not be enough. No easy apologies. I'm sorry would not do the trick this time. A reformation was in order, a genuine attempt at a new beginning.
>
> I'll tell you the God's own truth--I sat there and I cried. (73)

The tone of this passage is nicely balanced. There is a tension created between hushed suspense and Johnnie's typical self-aggrandizing tone, and a natural culmination of tension when Johnnie begins to cry. But his first genuine attempt at a new beginning is to head for the auction sale and get himself into more trouble. The point is that new, clean beginnings and self-transformations are not humanly possible. Simply, Johnnie's desire to start again with a clean slate reflects an eternal tendency of the human mind. His absurd but intensely emotional dialogue with the radio-voice of Applecart culminates, similarly, in tears and extravagant self-castigation: "For five minutes of your miserable sniveling existence, get up in front of people instead of behind them, and speak the unvarnished truth. No more of your measly little promises, your chiseling lies. Get up and tell everybody, speak out, stand up straight like a man and shout, tell the goddamn truth for a change" (97). It is not humanly possible always to avoid making promises, always to avoid telling lies. The very next day, Johnnie goes to the stampede and virtually claims that Doc Murdoch is responsible for the clown's death. In these last two instances, there is a broad pattern of unconscious irony developed. Johnnie's view of the idyllic, Edenic relationship between him and Helen ultimately shows his conscious awareness of the discrepancy between cherished illusion and reality. In the garden with Helen, Johnnie feels as if he is in another world--as if he has attained paradise and immortality: "I guess I felt I had done it at last, I had outfoxed old Master Fate" (156). He wants to "reach up and stop the old world from spinning . . . to stop time right there and say, 'Helen, I regret to say the sun will not come up this morning.'" (157). It seems that the paradisaic garden is the ideal setting in which to make a covenant of new beginnings--particularly since Helen is metaphorically endowed with the power, akin to that of the medieval Lady of the Lake, of restoring her wounded knight: "Helen touched my scars with her pale hands, her pale white hands and her beautiful mouth. She made me whole again" (165). Given the setting, given his companion, Johnnie feels, strongly, the old urge to start again clean. And a single bird-call rouses him to action:

> . . . somewhere in the high plum tree a bird sang. . . . A bird just burst out and sang; and in a sudden rage of ecstasy I leaped to my feet; I swept up my shirt and pants, my shoes and belt and the whole caboodle in my two long arms: I spun around and let go.
>
> I stood naked before Helen. The branches of trees, the flower beds and the bushes blossomed anew in sweat-stiffened clothes, in clothes that were much the worse for wear. My shorts were nothing but holes. I stood naked and proud in that garden, one sock on my left foot, my feet tender, nevertheless, my hands raised up in stark humility to that hidden bird, the stars wheeling as they pleased. 'Helen,' I said, 'it's all gone, and a good riddance of bad rubbish. I'm going to start over, from the ground up, from my birthday suit out.' . . . Six long strides that sprang from my longing: into the middle of the Doc's sunken pool. In I marched, going full bore, stopping for nothing. The pebbles be damned, the goldfish be damned. (166)

The bird is reminiscent of Keats's soul-coaxing nightingale. But the comic touches and Johnnie's easy-going colloquial idiom are absurdly incongruous with the magical night-setting. Consequently, the symbolic dip in Doc's fish pond becomes a grotesque parody of soul-cleansing. I think the entire scene is overdone, or over-played. In contrast to, say, Connor, Kroetsch makes deliberate ironic use of a mythical, metaphorical Edenic vision in order to show that the ideal of regeneration is an illusory ideal. But it is only human to keep the illusion alive imaginatively. And Johnnie finally realizes that all he can ever have of Helen is her image, to typify, for always, a world that is beyond human reaching: "She was the garden, the forest of my soul; a forest tangled and scented. A forest wild. She was the turf and torment of my raucous love. . . . H. P. was the paradox of my dreams" (208). As the work concludes, Johnnie, who is god-like now, even in Helen's eyes, is still wrestling with the problem of how to make amends; still caught in the very human conflict between selfish motives and altruistic motives. He does exist, certainly, in outlines that are larger than life; but his imperfect humanness is fully apparent.

CONCLUSION

> In the great cities, in the crowded places, the man-made world is too much with us; it blurs our responses to anything except the immediate, compels us to accept its values, shapes us in the long run to its ways. The prairies are a world that enables man to see himself clearly in relation not only to his fellow men but to those values that are inherent not in the Many but in the One. It is a world that persuades him to accept the fact of his own curious duality--that he is at once nothing and everything, at once the dust of the earth and the God that made it; a world that permits him to come to terms, perhaps subconsciously, with that duration which, in Sir Thomas Browne's mystic previsioning, 'maketh pyramids pillars of snow and all that's past a moment.'
>
> Certain it is that in the autumn days when the skies grow pale and the most haunting music of the earth, the cry of the wild goose, sounds the requiem of the dying year, the truth is borne home to him of the words of the wise man of old--a truth not of negation but of affirmation: _One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever_.
>
> --Saskatchewan

The allusion to Wordsworth at the beginning of this excerpt signals the kind of aesthetic sensibility McCourt is exercising in the epilogue to _Saskatchewan_. It is not a realist sensibility, for McCourt is a prairie man, and the concrete facts and the tangible quantities of a man-made world--quantites that might serve as stimuli to a realist sensibility--are lacking on the prairie. Rather, it is a romance sensibility, and what is important is that it derives directly from McCourt's perception of the fact of the land. In its simple immensity the prairie exists as a type of eternity, and it provides the basis for an imaginative attempt to understand what is, in itself, a meaningless, abstract term. In a sense, then, the prairie is itself a romancer, for it directs our perspective towards intangible realms. For the prairie writer, mimesis of the landscape involves mimesis of the unique influence that landscape has on human perception. In other words, if the writer is to capture the essential spirit of the prairie in fiction, he must turn something of a romancer. Not that he must absolutely deny the man-made world any place in his fictional re-creation of the prairie way of life. Simply, he must accept the fact that the man-made world is insignificant in comparison with its setting. He must learn to shift his aesthetic priorities from the actual and the immediate to the conceptual and remote; or, he must somehow try to balance his priorities. If he does not, he will make it very difficult for himself to bring to fictional life the great commonplace for which the prairie stands: earth abiding. That great commonplace is the matrix of the essential spirit of the prairie. It must be the matrix of at least some aspect of the artist's vision as well. I think that all four of the authors with whom I have dealt are keenly aware of the great commonplace their setting typifies. And all four show that impulse towards abstraction, that reaction to its own character which the landscape enforces in those who know it intimately. But two of them, McCourt and Grove, have chosen to work in a mode which, by definition, resists or frustrates the impulse towards abstraction. Consequently, they do not evoke the essential spirit of the prairie with a firm sense of poise. Nor do they achieve what seems to be their primary purpose in the works with a genuine sense of poise, for what tendency towards abstraction they show does not accord well with their generally objective and didactic intent. What their failures prove is that, despite the trend towards realism that begins in the fiction of the Canadian West in the 1920s, the innate romance sensibility of the prairie artist has not been submerged.

The mode which resists the impulse towards abstraction is, of course, the realistic mode, whether it works mainly through irony, as in

Music at the Close, where McCourt is concerned to show the discrepancy between illusory appearance and practical reality; or whether it works chiefly through social documentary, as in Fruits of the Earth, where Grove is concerned to show the material development of a rural community. Now realism has its place in the material world, and a worthy purpose in that world, for it gives us an objective understanding of contemporary life. It is important that we attain a rational understanding of the temporal human condition, for, as Yvor Winters says, "we are the products of history, of our personal histories, of our family histories, of the history of our nation, and the history of the occident--and the anthropologists tell us that we are in some part the product of that which preceded history. Unless we understand the history which produced us, we are determined by that history; we may be determined in any event, but the understanding gives us a chance."[1] Insofar as realistic art is a record of temporal phenomena, it becomes a means towards a fuller understanding of the history which produced us. It shows us how the social and ethical values of the Many have been derived, and it tests those values in a real social context, indicating which values are illusory or false or irrelevant, and giving us the reason why. Thus, in Music at the Close, McCourt tests Neil's nineteenth-century chivalric values and shows why they are illusory for the generation to which Neil belongs. But the essential spirit of the prairie is aloof to the sphere of the Many. It eludes the framework of art formed according to the conventions of the realistic mode. As already suggested, one very practical reason why the spirit of the prairie cannot be conveyed within the conventionally conservative frame of realism is that the material with which to construct that frame is scarce. Another reason is that the landscape looms too large to be compressed into the neatly squared outlines of the realistic mode. Thus, "The Prairie" chapter of Grove's Fruits of the Earth creates a sense of something out of proportion in the architectonics of the work. In itself, it is a successful evocation of impalpable spaciousness. But our view of it is blocked, on either side, by the weighty and detailed chronicle chapters. Still another reason why the spirit of the prairie eludes the framework of realism is that the prairie landscape resists the mediative impulse of the realistic mode, which characteristically tends to draw all extreme elements towards a predetermined norm--as Abe Spalding tries to invoke a predetermined moral norm in the Spalding district--or which tends simply to eliminate those extreme elements which cannot be normalized. The prairie is nature reduced to its lowest terms, and so it is emphatically stable and intransigent. It resists qualification according to bourgeois, middle standards. If the writer makes the mistake, as Grove does, of giving us a brief but illuminating glimpse of it, he only points up the comparative unsubstantiality of his so carefully detailed, middle-class framework. Set against the prairie, temporal, material realities are a mere vanity fair, regardless of what level of society those empirical realities represent.

Ross and Kroetsch have not resisted the impulse towards abstraction, and so there is not a sense of cross-purposes in their works. Both have chosen to work in a mode which permits their romance sensibility freedom of exercise. In As For Me and My House, we see empirical reality exploited and transformed into imaginative imagery. The Words of my Roaring approximates a nice balance between tangible and intangible spheres. In both, the tendency towards abstraction shows in the technique of characterization. Neither presents life in exact scale, and, if we come to the works expecting to find life in exact scale, we are bound to be disappointed. Ross reduces the actual outlines of ordinary human personality in order to aggrandize, in complementary fashion, the limits of imagination. And Kroetsch makes his characters do double duty, for they function as both realistic and symbolic entities. Both authors use their characters with a view towards realizing a fuller understanding of the great commonplace their setting indexes, and so their sacrifice of ordinary human personality need not be regarded in a negative light. Insofar as the characters function to help us realize the truth of the truism--what Hawthorne has called the truth of the human heart--they are life-affirming rather than life-denying. What is necessary is that they be judged according to the function they are intended to fulfil. Since their function is not a conventional realistic one, they ought not to be judged according to the conventions of the English realistic novel. In The Canadian West in Fiction, McCourt writes:

> Of all the forms of literary expression the novel is in this country the most conventional. Our novelists have almost without exception written in the manner sanctified by the solid Victorians. The three elements--plot, character, setting--are emphasized in their traditional proportions; the action progresses steadily through a series of climaxes to the properly exciting denouement. There are a few exceptions--Morley Callaghan, Grove in Master of the Mill--but generally the Canadian novelist is much less ready to experiment than our poets and dramatists. Perhaps the fault lies with a reading public intolerant of novelty, but few of our novelists give the impression of being suppressed innovators who have adapted their technique to suit the taste of a prim and conventional age. This is particularly true of our Western novelists, who have always tended to stick safely within the limits of the traditional.[2]

The Canadian West in Fiction is a 1949 publication, so, of course, McCourt could not know how far past the limits of the traditional Kroetsch would move. But, with regard to Western novelists, even in

1949, McCourt was not precisely accurate in his generalizations. In As For Me and My House, plot, character, and setting are not emphasized in their traditional proportions. Plot and character are subjugated, and the main emphasis is on setting. This last element is extremely important in both Ross's and Kroetsch's works. For both evoke a meeting and merging of the actual and the imaginary, and both are careful to set the stage for the meeting, with a meticulous control of tone and atmosphere that induces the reader to forfeit his hold on empirical reality and suspend his disbelief in probable impossibilities. In order to create a climate that is remote from empirical reality--a necessarily remote climate, if intangible concepts are to be explored with naturalness and ease--both Ross and Kroetsch have experimented, successfully, with non-traditional narrative techniques; Ross with impressionism, Kroetsch with surrealism. Impressionism and surrealism are both romantic in origin, for they function subjectively rather than objectively to shape our perspective of their respective narrative worlds. And, since both are relatively modern techniques, their appearance in the fiction indicates that, in terms of innovation, Western Canadian writers are now keeping pace with their colleagues in other countries. In the present decade, the issue that now needs to be posed, particularly with regard to the most recent works of Robert Kroetsch, is whether or not the tendency to evoke a fictional climate that is remote from empirical reality has been carried, beyond the limits of perception, beyond even the province of romance, to the point where it seeks to be understood without providing the means of understanding.

NOTES TO CHAPTERS

INTRODUCTION

[1] Edward A. McCourt, *The Canadian West in Fiction* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1949), pp. 110-111. Subsequent references are to this edition, with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

[2] René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, edited and with an introduction by Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 255.

[3] In the revised edition of *Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1961), Desmond Pacey cites Grove as one of the first prairie realists, and describes his work as "the most impressive achievement " of early Canadian realists. By realistic works, Pacey means novels that are "more sombre in tone" than such regional idylls as the *Jalna* series. "They probe more deeply into the lives of their characters, they treat more intensively the social environment and they are less given to sentimental and romantic evasions." I make no further references to Pacey because, with the exception of his enthusiastic response to Grove, much of what he says about prairie writers seems to echo McCourt.

[4] W. O. Mitchell, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1947), p. 3. The reference is to the Laurentian Library No. 14 edition.

[5] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 305.

[6] Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House* (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1941), p. 73. The reference is to the New Canadian Library No. 4 edition, published in 1957 with an introduction by Roy Daniells.

[7] Charles Child Walcutt, *Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 5.

[8] Yvor Winters, "Introduction," *Forms of Discovery: Essays on the Forms of the Short Poem in English* (Alan Swallow, 1967), p. xvi.

[9] Anatomy of Criticism, p. 136.

[10] For a detailed discussion of the mythological origins of the Wasteland theme, see Jesse L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), originally published by Cambridge University Press in 1920. Miss Weston traces the Wasteland and other aspects of the Grail legends back to sources in the Nature cults of primitive mythology.

[11] For a compact but thoroughly comprehensive survey of the evolution of romance, see Gillian Beer, The Romance, no. 10 in The Critical Idiom, general editor, John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1970).

[12] Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind (1947) is another example of romance in its lyrical mode, and might be discussed in conjunction with Ross's work. But As For Me and My House is a more pure representative of the mode. So, while I shall continue to make references to Mitchell, I shall confine my discussion of the lyrical mode to Ross's work.

[13] Maurice Z. Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, edited by Robert Murray Davis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 50. Subsequent references in this paragraph are to pp. 51-57 of this edition.

CHAPTER ONE

[1] James McNamee's them damn Canadians hanged Louis Riel! (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971) tells the story of the days immediately prior to and subsequent to Riel's execution in Regina from a young boy's point of view. McNamee is particularly effective in satirizing the Ontario Orangemen who have come to celebrate the hanging. But the ironic pivot is "Uncle Joe," who faithfully believes, up until the last moment, that "President Cleveland will send his bluecoats riding up here" to the rescue. Like Riel, Uncle Joe is a sometime U. S. citizen. After the hanging, the boy says, to make his uncle feel better, "Maybe the President will send the bluecoats up here to make them pay for what they did." Uncle Joe replies, "Redcoats! Bluecoats! . . . I'm sick of them! The only coats I want to see in this western country is buckskin jackets!"

[2] Edward McCourt, The Road Across Canada, illustrated by John A. Hall (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1965), p. 154.

[3] William Gilmore Simms, "Preface," The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina, edited and with an introduction and notes by C. Hugh Holman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. 6. The Yemassee was first published in 1835. The reference here is to Riverside Edition No. 65.

[4] In his preface to *The Deerslayer* (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., 1964), first published in 1841, Cooper counters the objection that he has given a more favourable picture of the red man than the red man deserves by saying: "It is the privilege of all writers of fiction, more particularly when their works aspire to the elevation of romances, to present the *beau idéal* of their characters to the reader. This it is which constitutes poetry, and to suppose that the red man is to be represented only in the squalid misery or in the degraded moral state that certainly more or less belongs to his condition is, we apprehend, taking a very narrow view of an author's privileges. Such criticism would have deprived the world of even Homer." Cooper's stipulation of the *beau idéal* becomes a convention for romance characterization.

[5] *The Road Across Canada*, p. 170.

[6] Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," p. 50.

[7] Frederick Niven's *The Lost Cabin Mine* (New York: John Lane Company, 1908), although it is primarily an adventure story, has as one of its most interesting themes the impact of the mountains on the minds of the men who live amongst them either in complete solitude, or with a single partner. The mountains seem to reduce a man to his most base or radical temperament; and, if his partner is of a different basic make-up, their incompatibility can result in violence. Niven's young narrator gets involved in the adventure because he has been invited to come along and keep the peace between two partners who are congenial enough in town, but murderous towards each other in the lonely mountain camps. One of them says, "It's queer how the mountains, when you get among them, seem to creep in all round you and lock you up. It doesn't take long among them with a man to know whether you and he belong to the same order and breed. There are men who can never sleep under the same blanket; yes, never sleep on the same side of the fire; never, after two days in the hills, ride side by side, but must get space between them."

[8] *The Road Across Canada*, pp. 172-173.

[9] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 33. The reference is to "The Centenary Text," with an introduction by Stephen A. Black. *The Scarlet Letter* was first published in 1850.

[10] *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 33.

[11] Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 11.

[12] The Canadian West in Fiction, p. 13.

[13] The Road Across Canada, p. 136.

[14] The Road Across Canada, p. 137.

[15] The Road Across Canada, p. 137.

[16] In Saskatchewan (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), McCourt writes: " . . . Manitoba is only half-way plains country; great forests line her eastern flank, northward her land surface is engulfed by inland fresh-water seas; and her heart--so many truculent true-blue westerners affirm--yearns towards Ontario. West of Saskatchewan amply endowed Alberta floats on a lake of oil and snuggles comfortably into the embrace of the Rockies; and even her most exposed parts feel from time to time the caress of the genial chinook." However, despite the differences, "there is a remarkable unity of spirit prevailing among prairie dwellers" of the three provinces.

[17] Frederick Philip Grove, Over Prairie Trails (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited, 1957), pp. 49-50. Over Prairie Trails was first published in 1922. The reference is to the New Canadian Library No. 1 edition, with introduction by Malcolm Ross.

[18] Over Prairie Trails, p. 51.

[19] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1967), p. 284. Moby-Dick was first published in 1851. The reference is to the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker.

[20] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Preface," The House of the Seven Gables (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), p. 1. The House of the Seven Gables was first published in 1851. The reference is to the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Seymour L. Gross.

[21] Aristotle, Poetics, translated by S. H. Butcher, introduction by Francis Fergusson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), pp. 109-110.

[22] The Norwegian author, Knut Hamsun, has a particularly striking way of evoking the ritualistic and the metaphysical in his re-creations of farm routine. In Growth of the Soil, translated by W. W. Worster, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), there is a sense of Ecclesiastes

in his descriptions of earthy folk working their way through the seasonal cycle. His central figure, Isak, he describes as: "A tiller of the ground, body and soul; a worker on the land without respite. A ghost risen out of the past to point the future, a man from the earliest days of cultivation, a settler in the wilds, nine hundred years old, and, withal, a man of the day. . . . Forest and field look on. All is majesty and power--a sequence and purpose of things."

[23] "Preface," House of the Seven Gables, p. 1.

[24] A good example of a farmer accepting the marvelous without question is Bent Candy in Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind. Although a religious man, Bent Candy is primarily a hard-nosed, acquisitive farmer. When he tries underhanded means to get hold of addle-brained Saint Sammy's purebred Clydes, Saint Sammy threatens him with the vengeance of the Lord. A prairie cyclone destroys Bent Candy's shiny new barn. In the aftermath, he looks at Sammy, knows Sammy is fey, but silently acquiesces in the belief that Sammy has the gift of prophecy. And, fittingly, Sammy has originally come by this gift after a hailstorm has levelled his crops.

[25] It is the rare author who can create characters who are fully realized personalities at the same time that they are fully realized symbols. Melville can do it. His Ahab has a real, lively presence at the same time that he represents the Promethean spirit willfully challenging God.

[26] Frye defines archetype as "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole."

A more psychologically oriented definition is provided by Emma Jung in her introduction to The Grail Legend, wtitten in collaboration with Marie-Louise von Franz and translated by Andrea Dykes (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971): "By archetype Jung, who introduced this term into psychology, understands a 'preconscious disposition' that enables a man to react in a human manner. Jung compares these dispositions or dominant structures in the psyche to the invisible potential existence of the crystalline structure in a saturated solution. They first take on form when they emerge into consciousness in the shape of images. . . . As inborn possibilities of forms of behaviour and comprehension, the archetypes are connected with the instincts, with which they have a reciprocal relation. They are human nature in the universal sense, in that they lead to the production of similar and ever-recurring archetypal images."

[27] Yvor Winters, "Aspects of the Short Poem in the English Renaissance," Forms of Discovery, p. 3.

28
I should add that, by realism, Grove means something more flexible than Wellek's definition: "the objective representation of contemporary social reality." In It Needs to be Said (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, at St. Martin's House, 1929), he says: "Realism . . . is the endeavour to reproduce nature or to describe real life just as it appears to the artist.

As it appears. Not as he wishes to see it. Not as he sometimes sees it. Not as it seems. As it appears. Only that appears which becomes clearly visible to the eye or perceptible to the ear, the sense, the mind, the soul." By attributing organs of perception to the soul, Grove suggests something of a Romantic, Coleridgean belief in the quasi-divine creative potential of the primary imagination. Coleridge, who first introduced "primary imagination" into aesthetic philosophy, defines it as "the living Power and prime agent of all human Perception."

29
Frederick Philip Grove, In Search of Myself (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1946), p. 260.

30
In Search of Myself, pp. 260-261.

31
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On Pœsy or Art," English Romantic Writers, edited by David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 492. "On POesy or Art" consists of notes for a lecture given in 1818.

32
M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1958), pp. 21-22. The Mirror and the Lamp was first published by Oxford University Press in 1933.

33
Yvor Winters, "Maule's Curse or Hawthorne and the Problem of Allegory," In Defense of Reason (Chicago: The Swallow Press Inc.), p. 170.

34
See Douglas O. Spettigue, Frederick Philip Grove: Studies in Canadian Literature, general editors Hugo McPherson and Gary Geddes (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1969), for evidence that Grove's "autobiography" is not factually reliable.

35
Yvor Winters, "Maule's Curse," p. 158.

36
Anatomy of Criticism, p. 76.

37
Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 304-305.

[38] Wellek, Concepts of Criticism, pp. 254-255. Wellek says "realism claims to be all-inclusive in subject matter and aims to be objective in method, even though this objectivity is hardly ever achieved in practice. Realism is didactic, moralistic, reformist. Without always realizing the conflict between description and prescription, it tries to reconcile the two in the concept of 'type' . . . it interprets 'type' as social type and not as universally human. . . . In some writers, but not all, realism becomes historic: it grasps social reality as dynamic evolution."

[39] Saskatchewan, p. 222.

[40] The Road Across Canada, pp. 170-171.

[41] Saskatchewan, p. 7.

[42] Saskatchewan, p. 9.

[43] In W. O. Mitchell's Jake and the Kid (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1961), "Prefessor" Godfrey in "The Liar Hunter" tries to explain why he thinks tall tales are an important index of the spirit of prairie people: "These men lie about the things that hurt them most. Their yarns are about the winters and how cold they are the summers and how dry they are. In this country you get the deepest snows, the worst dust storms, the biggest hailstones. . . . Rust and dust and hail and sawfly and cutworm and drouth are terrible things, but not half as frightening if they are made ridiculous. If a man can laugh at them he's won half the battle. When he exaggerates things he isn't lying really; it's a defence, the defence of exaggeration. He can either do that or squeal. . . . People in this country aren't squealers."

"The Liar Hunter" is sheer fun to read because, in showing Mr. Godfrey on the track of tall tales, Mitchell is able to weave several of them into the narrative. The topper of the lot is the tale of Albin Hobblemeyer, the giant grasshopper who plagued the district until, one day, Jake says, Albin "looked up an' seen one a them there four-engine bombers they're flyin' tuh Roosia. She was love at first sight. He took off, an' thuh last folks seen was two little black specks disappearin' tuh thuh North." And Jake finishes the story with, "Han' me that there manure fork will yuh, Kid?"

[44] Saskatchewan, pp. 9-10.

[45] Saskatchewan, p. 4.

[46] Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 15. Subsequent references in this paragraph are to pp. 13-21 of this edition.

[47] Illia Kiriak, *Sons of the Soil* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1959), pp. 10-11.

[48] Robert Kroetsch, *The Words of my Roaring* (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1966), p. 79.

[49] Philosophically, naturalism is a view of the world which takes account only of natural elements or forces, excluding the supernatural or spiritual; naturalism is a materialistic view that involves the belief that all phenomena are covered by laws of science and that all teleological explanations are therefore without value.

[50] Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition*, p. 2. Subsequent references in this paragraph are to pp. 5-13 of this edition.

[51] *Saskatchewan*, p. 6.

[52] *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 139.

[53] *Saskatchewan*, p. 224.

[54] Edward McCourt, *Music at the Close* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1966), p. 217. *Music at the Close* was first published in 1947 by The Ryerson Press. The reference is to the New Canadian Library No. 52 edition, with an introduction by Allan Bevan.

[55] Henry James, "Preface," *The American; The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, New York Edition, *Volume II* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), p. xiv. Subsequent references in this paragraph are to this edition.

[56] Henry James, "Preface," *The American*, p. xv.

[57] *The American Novel and its Tradition*, p. 27.

CHAPTER TWO

[1] Thomas Marc Parrot, "Introduction," *The Tragedy of Richard the Second, Shakespeare: Twenty-three Plays and the Sonnets* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938, 1953), p. 301.

[2] Edward McCourt, *Music at the Close*, p. 77. Subsequent references are to the New Canadian Library No. 52 edition, with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

[3] Shroder, "The Novel as a Genre," p. 45.

[4] See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), Chapter Six, pp. 149-165, for a thorough discussion of types of narration.

[5] See Arnold Hauser, *Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age, Volume Four, The Social History of Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp.220-223, for a discussion of the rationale behind surrealism.

[6] *The Canadian West in Fiction*, pp. 120-121.

[7] Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *Great Short Works of Stephen Crane* , introduction by James B. Colvert (New York: Harper & Row, 1965, 1968) pp. 125-126. *The Red Badge of Courage* was first published in 1895. References in this paragraph are to the Perennial Classic edition.

[8] *In Search of Myself*, p. 397.

[9] Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, pp. 254-255.

[10] Frederick Philip Grove, *Fruits of the Earth* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1965), p.26. *Fruits of the Earth* was first published in 1933 by J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. The reference is to the New Canadian Library No. 49 edition, with introduction by M. G. Parks. Subsequent references are to this edition, with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

[11] *In Search of Myself*, p. 227.

[12] See Vincent Foster Hopper, Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), Chapter II, for a comprehensive discussion of the symbolic meanings of astrological numbers.

[13] Hopper, p. 101.

[14] In Search of Myself, pp. 356-357.

[15] Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, pp. 460-461.

[16] See Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 163-186, for a full discussion of several of the characteristic facets of comedy.

[17] Laura Goodman Salverson, The Viking Heart (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Publishers, 1938), pp. 323, 325. The Viking Heart was first published in 1923 by George H. Doran Company.

[18] Kiriak, Sons of the Soil, pp. 90, 94.

CHAPTER THREE

[1] Ralph Freedman, "Nature and Forms of the Lyrical Novel," The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, edited by Robert Murray Davis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1969), p. 60.

[2] Sinclair Ross, As For Me and My House, p. 39. Subsequent references are to the New Canadian Library No. 4 edition, with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

[3] Freedman, pp. 64-65.

[4] Northrop Frye makes this point, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 135.

[5] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Chapter XIII," Biographia Literaria, English Romantic Writers, edited by David Perkins (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 452. Biographia Literaria was composed in 1815 but was not published until 1817.

[6] Arnold Hauser, *Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age*, pp. 158-159.

[7] Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, p. 43.

[8] See John Stuart Mill, "Nature," *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1874).

[9] *Saskatchewan*, p.9.

[10] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Tithonus," *Victorian and Later English Poets*, edited by James Stephens, Edwin L. Beck, and Royall H. Snow (New York: American Book Company, Copyright 1934, 1936, 1937, 1949), p. 116.

[11] Friederich Nietzsche, "A Critical Backward Glance," *The Birth of Tragedy and The Geneology of Morals*, translated by Francis Golffing (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), p. 9. *The Birth of Tragedy* was first published in 1872.

[12] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, pp. 164-165.

[13] *Moby-Dick*, p. 169.

[14] In one instance, Mrs. Bentley refers to El Greco as "an angel of destruction from the canine lower world" (121). I think the dog has an important function as a kind of archetypal symbol of a lawless sphere. His name enhances his symbolic quality, if one considers what El Greco the artist is noted for. See H. W. Janson and Dora Jane Janson, *History of Art: A Survey of the Major Visual Arts From the Dawn of History to the Present Day*, edited by Milton S. Fox (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., and New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1965). *History of Art* was first printed in 1962.

Particularly in his later works, El Greco is noted for his free, impressionistic technique, his increasing disregard for natural form and conventional modelling, his transition from narrative description to symbolical interpretation of visionary subjects.

[15] See C. I. Scofield, *The New Scofield Reference Bible: Authorized King James Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.610.

[16] Robert Kroetsch, The Words of my Roaring (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1966), p.4. Subsequent references are to this edition, with page numbers indicated in parentheses.

[17] The Canadian West in Fiction, pp. 52-54.

[18] Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," Collected Poems: 1934-1952 (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1966), p.159. The reference is to the Everyman's Library edition.

[19] Hauser, pp. 223-224.

[20] Jesse Bier, The Rise and Fall of American Humour (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p.42.

CONCLUSION

[1] Yvor Winters, "Introduction," Forms of Discovery, p. xix.

[2] The Canadian West in Fiction, pp. 99-100.

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